

The Human Landscape in Proust - A Study in Flower Symbolism

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This thesis seeks to prove the existence of a well-planned pattern of images and symbols in Proust's work, a pattern denied him by many critics. The images which concern us the most are the flower images through which we can analyse Proust's "human landscape". That is, Proust expressed his main theme, built up a symbolic code of colours, described his important characters, and contrasted Society and Nature - Paris salons and Combray countryside - through his flower imagery. The main theme which this thesis follows most closely is that of the apprenticeship of the young artist, who must be tested by suffering, symbolized by the storm motif which is associated with many flowers. Proust's important colours, in brief, are the white of innocence, ignorance, or denial of suffering; the red of experience or passion, in all senses of the word; and the mauve or black of dangerous love, especially homosexuality or lesbianism. The main characters we will trace through various flower symbols are Marcel himself, Gilberte, the Duchess of Guermantes, Odette, Swann, Aunt Léonie, Charlus, and, perhaps most important of all, Albertine. The hawthorns, the apple blossom, the pear blossom, the red and violet flowers of the Guermantes' estate, the lilacs, the dried lime-tree blossoms, the water-lilies, the cattleya, the orchid and the pine tree, the rose and the forget-me-not all deserve and obtain a chapter each. Another chapter discusses the grand panorama of the seasons, which Proust expressed in vast human landscapes found in Odette's winter garden salon, the Bois de Boulogne, and the winter forest of aged friends which confronts Marcel at the final reception at the Guermantes. In this study of the seasons, social and natural, we find Proust, through Marcel emphasizing the sterility of denying the processes of change in this world and the creativity of accepting Time and incorporating it into a work of art. Since Proust did, in fact, plan his novel extremely carefully, an analysis of his conclusions forms the conclusion of this thesis.

I hereby declare that this thesis was composed by me and is my own work. Some of the material on page 454 of this thesis has been published in an article in le Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust et des Amis de Combray (1974).



PREFACE

I should like to warn any reader who may try to use this thesis to check on details of presentation that the British form of footnotes for articles, in which the title of the article is placed in quotation marks and the name of the journal is italicized, is more widely accepted than the form I have used. To those readers interested in the Celtic idea of the poet-king or warrior, I would like to emphasize that this theme is basic to the Celtic concept of the hero but that it can also be seen in individual legends such as those surrounding Cú Chulainn or Finn mac Cumal. I have made use of the wealth of knowledge available in such books as Graves' White Goddess although I do not necessarily subscribe to the general theories presented in them. Finally, I would like to point out that the pattern of symbols which I have chosen to help reveal the underlying structure of Proust's novel is only one of many which could be so used. I hope I can convince the reader, however, that a detailed textual analysis of Proust is especially rewarding and that any reader who also chooses an individual theme, character or group of symbols can have a great deal of scope for an original study of Proust.

ABBREVIATIONS

C. S.	Du Côté de chez Swann	2
J. F.	A L'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs	86
C. G.	Le Côté de Guermantes	96
S. G.	Sodome et Gomorrhe	131
P.	La Prisonnière	277
F.	La Fugitive	285
T. R.	Le Temps Retrouvé	393

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Two of the most common popular misconceptions about Proust are that his books, especially A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, lack structure and that he, as an author, was hopelessly nostalgic. This thesis attempts to refute both assertions through a detailed study of Proust's flower imagery in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu and, to some extent, in his earlier works. Proust himself was provoked more than once to defend himself from similar attacks from his readers, as his reply to a letter from Jacques Rivière shows us. The most obvious general pattern of Proust's flower imagery traces the artistic apprenticeship of Marcel (the protagonist of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu) through various stages of maturity, which Proust further illustrates in certain set pieces dominated by the season best representing the stage of Marcel's development at that part of the novel. However, this pattern can only be discerned by studying the novel as a whole, an impossibility for early Proust readers, who had recourse only to Du Côté de Chez Swann. Thus, one such passage describing Marcel's autumnal nostalgia for the Bois de Boulogne of his youth, filled with beautiful flower-like women and gilded by his own youthful faith, was generally taken as a literal expression of Proust's own views. Proust was therefore so pleased when Jacques Rivière 'sensed' the underlying structure and serious intent of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu that, in his reply to Rivière's letter, he revealed his novel's plan and its theme of a quest for truth much more explicitly than he would perhaps have done had other readers shown a similar understanding. For, we can see in Proust's letter a desire that his novel speak for itself.

Enfin je trouve un lecteur qui devine que mon livre est un ouvrage dogmatique et une construction! ... J'ai trouvé plus probe et plus délicat comme artiste de ne pas laisser voir, de ne pas annoncer que c'était justement à la recherche de la Vérité que je parlais, ni en quoi elle consistait pour moi. Je déteste tellement les ouvrages idéologiques où le récit n'est tout le temps qu'une faillite des intentions de

l'auteur que j'ai préféré ne rien dire. Ce n'est qu'à la fin du livre, et une fois les leçons de la vie comprises, que ma pensée se dévoilera. Celle que j'exprime à la fin du 1er volume, dans cette parenthèse sur le Bois de Boulogne ... est le contraire de ma conclusion. Elle est une étape, d'apparence subjective et dilettante, vers la plus objective et croyante des conclusions.

(1)

We shall return to this quotation in the conclusion, when we shall study in detail the various long descriptive passages devoted to the different stages of Marcel's life. Here, however, nothing could serve better to introduce a résumé of Proust's criticism and to indicate the not always flattering reception of Proust's work. At another point, Proust says :

Dans Du Côté de Chez Swann, certaines personnes, mêmes très lettrées, méconnaissant la composition rigoureuse bien que voilée (et peut-être plus difficilement discernable parce qu'elle était à large ouverture de compas et que le morceau symétrique d'un premier morceau se trouvait à un grand intervalle l'un de l'autre) crurent que mon roman était une sorte de recueil de souvenirs, s'enchaînant selon les lois fortuites de l'association des idées.

(2)

Proust, then, had a very clear plan in mind; we shall see later many examples of the symmetrical passages he mentions. In fact, Proust wrote the introduction to A la Recherche du Temps Perdu and the conclusion of the novel before he wrote the intervening material precisely so that he could control the way in which the one would counter-balance the other.

We must add that Proust himself probably did not expect to be immediately recognized; at least he did not award immediate success to his fictional artists in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu as the following extract shows : D'ailleurs lui et Mme Cottard, avec une

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- (1) Proust et Rivière : Correspondance 1914-22, présentée et annotée par Philip Kolb, Librairie Plon, Paris, 1955, pp. 1-2.
(2) Proust, Marcel : A Propos du "style" de Flaubert, Essais et Articles, Editions Gallimard, 1971, p. 598.

sorte de bon sens comme en ont aussi certaines gens du peuple, se gardaient bien de donner une opinion ou de feindre l'admiration pour une musique qu'ils s'avouaient l'un à l'autre, une fois rentrés chez eux, ne pas plus comprendre que la peinture de "M. Biche". Comme le public ne connaît du charme, de la grâce, des formes de la nature que ce qu'il en a puisé dans les poncifs d'un art lentement assimilé, et qu'un artiste original commence par rejeter ces poncifs. M. et Mme Cottard, image en cela du public, ne trouvaient ni dans la sonate de Vinteuil, ni dans les portraits du peintre, ce qui faisait pour eux l'harmonie de la musique et la beauté de la peinture. Il leur semblait quand le pianiste jouait la sonate qu'il accrochait au hasard sur le piano des notes que ne reliaient pas en effet les formes auxquelles ils étaient habitués, et que le peintre jetait au hasard des couleurs sur ses toiles
(C. S., p. 213).

Of course, Proust was more fortunate than his characters and than many artists of genius, for he had to wait only two years after the date of his reply to Jacques Rivière's letter to see his talent officially recognized (by the Prix Goncourt of 1919) if not generally understood. Time, of course, has verified Proust's worth, yet, even today there are critics whose comments on Proust's supposed lack of structure sound remarkably similar to the criticism of the Cottard's on the 'haphazard' work of Vinteuil and Elstir. The main theme of Gilles Deleuze's book Marcel Proust et les Signes is the lack of unity, the pervasive fragmentation of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, a point with which, however, M. Bonnet entirely disagrees ⁽³⁾. Even such an astute critic as V. E. Graham, who points out large quantities of closely related images in his excellent articles Proust's Alchemy and Water Imagery and Symbolism in Proust can write in his book on imagery "It would be quite wrong to seek an opening metaphor for every one of Proust's images or to look for a hidden significance. Less than one-quarter of the images

(3) Bonnet, Henri : La Tentative Structurale de Gilles Deleuze, Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust et des Amis de Combray, §22; 1972, pp. 1190-1200.

on which this study is based could be said to have any preparation in their context and fewer than one in ten of his images could be said to have any symbolic function" ⁽⁴⁾. However, as we have seen, Proust himself admitted to putting a great deal of preparation into the basic structure of his novel, and thus we would suppose him to have taken similar care with the details, as is, in fact, the case.

As so often happens to an author, various fellow writers failed, at first anyway, to appreciate Proust's work. The most quoted example, of course, is that of Gide, who rejected Proust's manuscript for publishing because, by chance, he opened it up at a page on which Proust had made a ridiculous error of anatomical detail in a description of Aunt Léonie. It has been said that he had already been put off by Proust's reputation as a snob and as a socialite ⁽⁵⁾. However, Gide later acknowledged in most generous terms his error in not accepting Proust's work. In fact, he later proved a very just critic of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, picking out Proust's weaknesses whilst noting his good points as well. The one main weakness Gide points out concerns the one subject on which Proust does fail to record the truth, homosexuality.

Le système qui consiste à ne pas accorder crédit, à ne pas tenir compte de ce qui déplaît et gêne, est trop simple et se retourne nécessairement, tôt ou tard, contre ceux qui le pratiquent. Pour la question sexuelle; j'admire qu'ils crient, comme Souday : "La mesure est comble", alors qu'elle commence seulement à se remplir

(4) Graham, V. E. : The Imagery of Proust, Basil Blackwood, Oxford, 1966, p. 253.

(5) Bornecque, J. Henry : André Gide et 'Du Côté de Chez Swann', Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust et des Amis de Combray, §7, 1957, pp. 307,8.

crainctivement. Ceux-ci font indirectement l'apologie de l'hypocrisie et du rassurant camouflage Pratiqué par un si grand nombre de littérateurs, et des plus illustres, à commencer par Proust ... Les quelques timides peintures que certains audacieux en risquent sont encore si timorées, si réticentes qu'elles choquent sans nullement satisfaire à la vérité. (6)

The 'camouflage' to which Gide refers, is the way in which Proust allegedly turned his own homosexual encounters into Marcel's heterosexual ones in A l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs, a decision which, Gide said, Proust later admitted regretting. (We shall discuss this information in detail in later chapters). To a modern reader, it surely matters little that Albertine, or any other of the feminine characters with semi-masculine names, may have been modelled on men in Proust's life; a much more important point is that Proust's ambivalent attitude towards homosexuality, guilt underlying his wish for honesty, resulted in some of his least successful images (as we shall see in the orchid chapter).

Gide also had some reservations about Proust's style. In fact his criticism gives us another reason why contemporary critics of Proust could not understand his work :

L'architecture, chez Proust, est très belle; mais il advient souvent, comme il n'enlève rien de l'échafaudage, que celui-ci prenne plus d'importance que le monument même, dont le regard, sans cesse distrait par le détail, ne parvient plus à saisir l'ensemble. Proust le savait, et c'est là ce qui le faisait, dans ses lettres et dans sa conversation, insister tant sur la composition générale de son oeuvre : il savait bien qu'elle ne sauterait pas aux yeux. (7)

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- (6) Gide, André : Journal 1889-1939, Librairie Gallimard, 1948, p. 1087.
(7) Ibid, p. 1322.

This quotation seems to be an example of mutual misunderstanding; as Gide, like so many contemporary critics was writing from an - often unavoidable - incomplete knowledge of the whole of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu (in this case, he had just finished A l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs) which does tend to put much seemingly extraneous detail into context. We feel, too, that Léon Pierre-Quint has a point when he indicates that the difference between Proust and Gide went much deeper than stylistic considerations. For, throughout the French novel of Proust's time, or sometime later, runs a very strong philosophical, often moralistic, emphasis (as seen in Mauriac, Maurois, Gide and Sartre, to name a few). "Gide" says Léon Pierre-Quint "had no interest in Proust's characters because for him moral conflict alone gives people their reality" (8). This comment may be rather harsh, for, as we have seen, Gide was capable of appreciating Proust and admitting his original error; however, it does highlight the difference between Proust, who, by his own admission, 'hated ideological novels', and so many contemporary and later novelists. Sartre, for example, makes a comment on the lack of cohesion and dynamism in Proust's work which shows his tendency to criticize other authors according to his own philosophical framework, as well as his lack of understanding of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. "Dans ces volumes" says Sartre "personne ne fait rien; il n'arrive rien; c'est une suite toute passive de situations statiques" (9). Despite the fact that Proust put more emphasis on thought than on action, this criticism is simply not true. Everything in his main novel is in a

(8) Pierre-Quint, Léon : Marcel Proust, his Life and his Work, Marcel Proust, Reviews and Estimates in English, Stanford University Press, 1942, p. 179.

(9) Newman, Pauline : Marcel Proust et l'Existentialisme, nouvelles éditions latines, Paris 1952, p. 56.

state of flux. Marcel's maturing in his quest for truth (most often found through suffering) is the main theme of the novel and is often illustrated by flower imagery, flowers being the beautiful but ephemeral promise of eventual maturing in nature. Proust further uses the metaphor of the seasons to show us the rise and fall in importance of individuals and large groups in society. No one can escape the modifying influence of time, but in fact, Proust sees this process as being part of the universal pattern of creativity. Those characters who do not have the courage or the wisdom to face this fact lose their creative qualities. Swann becomes frozen, sterile, incapable of developing further. Odette and Ski (a failed artist) retain the outward semblance of their youth, but the former, Proust likens to "une rose stérilisée" (T.R., p. 950) while the latter, he describes as "une fleur ou un fruit qui a séché" (T.R., p. 936).

R. M. Albérès, too, suggests that, "dans cette perspective moraliste" adopted by such authors as Mauriac, Julien Green, Bernanos, Malraux, Camus and Sartre, "un Proust et un Joyce apparaissaient comme des esthètes aberrants" (10). But, though Proust may have appeared strange in terms of the preoccupations of novelists of the time, his enthusiasm for aesthetics was shared by many poets of the turn of the century, some of whom he quotes in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. Nonetheless, Proust could be said to have learned some of his concern for aesthetics from Ruskin, while he was occupied with translating that writer's works. He also much enjoyed such English novelists as George Eliot (11) and

(10) Albérès, R. M. : Métamorphoses du roman, Editions Albin Michel, Paris, 1966, pp. 10-11.

(11) Proust, Marcel : Contre Saint-Beuve, Editions Gallimard, 1971, pp. 656-7.

Thomas Hardy, whose works reflect a similar feeling for landscapes as do Proust's⁽¹²⁾. "From the line of English novelists, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, in particular, fostered his appreciation for moral landscapes", Harold Levin notes of Proust⁽¹³⁾. (We shall define the term 'moral landscape' later in this introduction.) Yet this affinity to English literature did not guarantee Proust a welcome reception by English writers. E. M. Forster, himself such a sensitive creator of human landscapes that his works are mainly concerned with the effect of the surrounding countryside on his characters, even Forster had an initial bad opinion of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, of which he said, "This book is chaotic, ill constructed, it has no external shape "⁽¹⁴⁾. Like Gide, however, Forster later came to modify this criticism. In another article, a fruit of a second or rereading of Proust in translation, Forster does show more appreciation of Proust. His comments are most perceptive and even his criticism of Proust's style is expressed in images which suggest that he understood the importance of natural images and patterns for Proust :

A sentence begins quite simply, then it undulates and expands, parentheses intervene like quick-set hedges, the flowers of comparison bloom, and three fields off, like a wounded partridge, crouches the principal verb, making one wonder as one picks it up, poor little thing, whether after all it was worth such a tramp, so many guns, and such expensive dogs, and what after all,

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- (12) Proust; Marcel : A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, La Prisonnière, Editions Gallimard 1954, p. 376. All quotations from A la Recherche du Temps Perdu are from the Editions Gallimard and will be quoted in the text with the initials for the book in which they appear, e.g. "P." stands for La Prisonnière.
- (13) Levin, Harold : The Gates of Horn, Oxford University Press, N.Y., 1965, p. 384.
- (14) Forster, E. M. : Aspects of the Novel: Marcel Proust, Reviews and Estimates in English, p. 97.

is its relation to the main subject, potted so gaily half a page back, and proving finally to have been in the accusative case. (15)

This metaphor, which shows Forster's appreciation of the organic growth of some of Proust's sentences, does, however, also betray his humorous - but aggressive - attitude towards it. Forster adds, with a great deal of insight, that Proust's novel is an adventure story on a social and artistic level. Since he emphasizes the theme of love in Proust, A la Recherche du Temps Perdu remains for him "an epic of curiosity and despair" (16), and, certainly, there is much pessimism in Proust's treatment of love. However, we cannot really agree that this despair continued into the realm of art. Like Forster, many critics, Proust's contemporaries or ours, fail to see the thread of gold, the theme of joy, attached to art which makes all suffering and knowledge worthwhile in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. We shall follow the growing ability of the young hero to recognize and accept joy mainly in conjunction with light imagery, the gradual movement from a melancholy and Romantic moon to a joyous sunrise, as associated with 'l'aubépine'.

D. H. Lawrence, who also loved the English countryside, deplored its destruction by industry, and used it as a uniting force in so many of his novels, failed to see a similar process at work in Proust, and dismissed his novel as too bitty. (17) But, with him as well, the real bone of contention was Proust's treatment of love, which Lawrence felt

(15) Forster, E. M. : Abinger Harvest, Edward Arnold & Co., London 1936, p. 94.

(16) Ibid. p. 95.

(17) Deakin, William : D. H. Lawrence's Attacks on Proust and Joyce, Essays in Criticism, vii, 4 (Oct. 1957); p. 389.

was destroyed by too much analysis. Thus, Proust tended to by-pass the mainstream of the contemporary French novel by his treatment (or lack of treatment) of ethical ideas, and that of the contemporary English novel by his particular treatment of the theme of love. Nor was his style much enjoyed by authors in either country. Even Proust's claim to have constructed his novel carefully was contested. However, times and ideas have changed. Nowadays, on the other side of the ledger, there are many critics who recognize clearly the basic pattern in Proust's work, especially as shown by the hawthorn imagery. That one of these critics, Butor, is a modern-day author, does much to redress the lukewarm reception from some of Proust's literary contemporaries.

Proust's letters, such as the ones we have already quoted, have always shown him to be a competent self critic, as Philip Kolb acknowledges, "Il attachait à ces questions de structure, de symétrie, de contraste, une importance ... considérable ... comme le révèlent certaines de ses lettres " (18). Pierre Clarac (19) and Raymond Queneau (20) have also found in Proust's letters evidence of his preoccupation with the structure of his work. From his own analysis of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, Ullmann ventures more specific criticism of Proust's structure. Proust's

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- (18) Kolb, Philip : L'Univers de Marcel Proust et sa correspondance, Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust et des Amis de Combray, §21, 1971, p. 1317.
- (19) Clarac, Pierre : Ce que croyait Proust, Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust et des Amis de Combray, §8, 1958, p. 1330.
- (20) Queneau, Raymond : The Unfinished Symphony, Adam International Review, xxv, 260 (1957), p. 66.

images from art, he says, "can be obscure and a little precious" (21), unlike his images from nature. "The most interesting feature of Proust's plant images is that they tend to develop around certain themes which play an important part in the novel and in the whole cycle" (22). More generally, Ullmann adds, "In spite of its variety and heterogeneity, Proust's imagery shows a remarkable degree of cohesion and tends to form clearly discernible patterns" (23). "Imagery may ... take the critic by a straight route to the very core of the work of art" (24).

Another of Proust's letters shows that he, too, believed that imagery could lead the poet to the heart of things and that he was particularly alive to flower imagery. Discussing a collection of poems called Les Iris Noirs, by Paul Reboux, Proust remarks to the young poet :

Mais quand on sait les humaniser les plus merveilleuses complications deviennent simples et touchantes, comme ces Iris Noirs qu'avant vous je n'aimais guère, mais au sein caché desquels vous aviez su découvrir un coeur de feu. C'est l'office du poète d'aller en tout au coeur des choses. La nature peut dire de lui comme l'héroïne racinienne qu'il "a trouvé le chemin de son coeur". Il n'y a pas de pauvre coquelicot auquel il ne puisse nous attacher, en nous initiant à son charme. Mais même aux fleurs compliquées qui semblent d'abord réservées aux riches sans imagination il peut nous conduire, et nous y montrer un coeur de feu comme en ces iris noirs que vous m'avez fait aimer (25).

(21) Ullmann, Stephen : The Image in the Modern French Novel, University of Cambridge Press, 1960, p. 173.

(22) Ibid, p. 187.

(23) Ibid, p. 193.

(24) Ibid, viii.

(25) Proust, Marcel : Lettre à Paul Reboux, mai 1898, Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust et des Amis de Combray, §24, 1974, p. 1803.

Thus, it is not surprising that a large proportion of critics who do seem to understand Proust's work and to grasp its basic unity have been impressed by the flower imagery which is at its heart. Pierre Costil, for example, recognizes not only the basic order of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu but also its significance. "Proust lui-même a tenu à en souligner l'architecture ferme et claire, l'équilibre symétrique des deux "côtés", l'exacte correspondance du Temps retrouvé au Temps perdu, la disposition intérieure en rosace" (26). And he adds :

Chez [Proust] comme chez tous les grands artistes la forme n'est pas un ornement superficiel et qu'on puisse détacher; elle fait corps avec le fond, et son oeuvre nous offre, non des fleurs poétiques, mais la poésie même de la fleur ... on comprend que les fleurs et leurs parfums nous introduisent jusqu'au coeur même de son oeuvre et de son génie. (27)

The one flower in particular which has introduced critics to the structure of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu is the hawthorn. Michel Butor, who, as an author, makes up for the earlier lack of appreciation for Proust in literary circles, J. M. Cocking and Inoué pay the most detailed tribute to the hawthorns. Butor remarks of flowers in general that "elles sont dans A la Recherche du Temps Perdu l'image par excellence de la sexualité" (28). He mentions Françoise's comment "Qui du cul d'un chien s'amour^ose, Il lui paraît une rose" and Swann's euphemism "faire cattleya" for the act of love (29). Although he does not associate the

(26) Costil, Pierre : La Construction musicale de la Recherche du Temps Perdu, Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust et des Amis de Combray, §8, 1958, p. 469.

(27) Costil, Pierre : Proust et la Poésie de la Fleur, Bulletin §13, 1963, p. 20.

(28) Butor, Michel : Les Oeuvres d'art imaginaires chez Proust, University of London, the Athlone Press, 1964, p. 27.

(29) Op. Cit.

pink hawthorn with the septet and the white hawthorn with the sonata , many other critics do. Marie Miguet points out the similarity of colour contrast between the white and red flowers and the 'white' and 'red' pieces of music as proof of Proust's careful structuring. Cocking, moving beyond style to content, remarks that the white of the sonata represents a spiritual quality. (30). To N. Kostis, the white hawthorn signifies purity and the red or pink, sensuality. (31). However, Rina Viers quite rightly warns us of the dubious nature of this 'virginity' of the white especially, and to some extent, the pink, hawthorn. (32). To Ashkenasy-Lelu, pink is associated with appetite. (33), and to Inoué, the pink hawthorns hide an element of desire.

Disons que son amour pour les aubépines est un désir instinctif pour des vérités obscures que la Terre cache et le sollicite d'extraire. D'une part, c'est un désir d'amour, désir pour une jeune fille; désir pour un monde caché, désir suscité tantôt par une odeur si forte qu'on est presque affolé, tantôt par l'idée religieuse qui s'associe à cette fleur si pure. (34)

Francis Fardwell, on the other hand, adequately points out the spiritual connotations of the red colouring of the hawthorns. (35), mentioning

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- (30) Cocking, J. M. : Proust and Music, Essays in French Literature, no. 4, (Nov., 1967), p. 24.
- (31) Kostis, Nicholas : Albertine, characterization through image and symbol, PMLA, 84, no. 1 (Jan., 1969) p. 126.
- (32) Viers, Rina : La Signification des Fleurs dans l'oeuvre de Marcel Proust, Bulletin \$25, 1975, p. 157.
- (33) Aschkenasy-Lelu : Les Sens mineurs chez Proust, Bulletin \$9, 1959, p. 49.
- (34) Inoué, Kynichiro : Les Aubépines, fleurs proustiennes, Adam International Review, xxv, \$260, 1957, London, p. 130.
- (35) Fardwell, Francis Virginia : Landscape in the Works of Marcel Proust, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, 1948, p. 39.

Proust's image "une coupe de marbre rose, de rouges sanguines" (C. S., p. 140) for the corolla of the pink hawthorns as a symbol of the sacrament (36).

As far as colours are concerned, however, Butor excels in pointing out their structural significance, while Ninette Bailey excels in analysing their emotional and psychological import. In discussing the sonata and septet (although many of his comments could also apply to the pink and white hawthorns), Butor says "Il y avait déjà dans Un Amour de Swann une analyse, on passait de la réduction pour piano (exécution Verdurin) à la dualité piano violon (exécution Sainte-Euverte). On passait du mauve, couleur de l'évanescent, à une opposition entre l'ultraviolet, couleur invisible, et l'irisé, couleur du visible" (37). Butor is one of the few critics, along with Jauss and Germaine Brée, to see a progression in Proust's imagery, in this case, a progression from the sonata built around five notes to the septet constructed around seven (38). Further to the meaning of the colours Proust uses, Butor says :

Le mauve, couleur de l'inalysé, est étroitement lié à l'angoisse et au secret sexuel; c'est la couleur du "cattleya". La blancheur, c'est la couleur de la virginité, du paradis d'où la faute sexuelle nous a fait tomber. Le rose, et le rouge, sont d'abord la couleur de la honte, du désir, mais aussi de plus en plus la couleur de l'aveu, de la "déclaration". Dans [A la Recherche du Temps Perdu] la lumière se déploie ainsi progressivement sur le spectre de la sexualité. C'est pourquoi le septuor débute dans un rouge d'aurore si éclatant, pour toucher au passage l'or de midi qui correspond en même temps à "la plus épaisse joie" "trainant à terre", avec la mèche de Morel, ange sinistre opposé à la jeune

(36) Ibid, p. 56.

(37) Butor, Michel : Les Oeuvres d'Art Imaginaires chez Proust, p. 34.

(38) Ibid, p. 35.

harpiste, telle la corne d'un démon, pour arriver peu à peu à travers toutes les autres couleurs au brouillard violet qui dévoile peu à peu le paradis : "une joie ineffable qui semble venir du paradis", un paradis annoncé par un "archange de Mantegna sonnante dans un buccin", vêtu d'une robe d'écarlate, un archange du Jugement. (39)

This particular passage which Butor analyses (P., pp. 249-263) will be important in our analysis of the Hawthorne imagery.

Ninette Bailey, too, refers to the 'colour' of Vinteuil's music. "Malgré sa valeur visuelle et picturale", she says, "la couleur dans A la Recherche du Temps Perdu ... est fondamentalement un élément poétique plutôt qu'une dimension visuelle de l'univers Proustien" (40). In an essay on Proust's revisions of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu she remarks that each time that Proust improves a description in his novel, he adds a colour (41). Even imaginary colours are added - as in the example of Vinteuil's sonata becoming white (42). She analyses most convincingly the erotic quality of the colours pink, violet and purple for Proust from the association of mauve with a couple in Jean Santeuil to the way in which Albertine is described in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu in a spectrum from "la blanche cire" to "un rouge presque noir", to the care with which Proust adds the colours pink and violet to the description of the father in the later novel :

à la figure du père, absent du texte de Jean Santeuil ... figure par elle-même symbolique du châtiment, Proust prend soin d'ajouter - comme un emblème des deux faces de la sensualité, la première

(39) Ibid, p. 39.

(40) Bailey, Ninette : Couleur picturale et couleur poétique dans 'Les Plaisirs et les Jours', Bulletin §16, p. 422.

(41) Bailey, Ninette : Le Rôle des Couleurs dans la genèse de l'Univers Proustien, Modern Language Review, LX, (April) p. 188.

(42) Ibid, p. 191.

heureuse et avouable, l'autre défendue et criminelle - les deux couleurs du rose et du violet.

(43)

These colours, of course, are particularly important to Proust's flower imagery, and Ninette Bailey astutely points out the way in which Proust transfers Odette's loose morals onto the flowers which surround her through his adroit descriptive use of imaginative colours - Odette's violets having "une couleur délavée, mauve, liquide et dissolue" (J. F., p. 594) ⁽⁴⁴⁾.

Jauss, in his sensitive criticism of the lilac imagery, mentions the colour of the lilacs ⁽⁴⁵⁾, but mainly emphasizes their association with dove imagery (the dove being a symbol of innocence) ⁽⁴⁶⁾ and later with storm imagery ⁽⁴⁷⁾ (the storm being, for Proust, a symbol of suffering and experience). Still, when we consider that doves are usually considered as being white and that Proust describes the brooding sky that precedes a storm as being an angry purple colour, we may have, with the lilacs as well as the hawthorns, an example of Proust's symbolic dichotomy of colours. Germaine Brée, like Jauss, emphasizes the progression of Proust's imagery when she talks of "the poetry of landscape" and the "inner succession of almost psychological seasons" ⁽⁴⁸⁾.

(43) Bailey, Ninette : Symbolisme et composition dans l'oeuvre de Proust, French Studies xx, no. 3, (July 1966) p. 256.

(44) Ibid, p. 255.

(45) Jauss, Hans Robert : Zeit und Erinnerung in Marcel Proust's 'A la Recherche du Temps Perdu', Carl Winter, Heidelberg, University Verlag, 1955, p. 100.

(46) Ibid, p. 101.

(47) Ibid, p. 102.

(48) Brée, Germaine : Marcel Proust, trans. C. J. Richards and A. D. Truitt, Rutgers University Press, N. B., N. J., 1955, p. 11.

Rina Viers, too, shows an interest in the meaning of Proust's flowers, and she analyses Proust's choice of the orchid as a symbol for the homosexual with a wealth of detail from biology texts and Biblical legends. ⁽⁴⁹⁾ Indeed, she is the only critic so far, (with the exception of Pierre Costil, whose article on the poetry of flowers in Proust is quite general) to devote an entire paper solely to flower imagery in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. However, this paper, La Signification des Fleurs dans l'Oeuvre de Marcel Proust, contains so many points pertinent to this thesis that we shall deal with each idea separately in the chapter to which it applies.

One further article, by Jeannine Paques, studies the image of the poppy. ⁽⁵⁰⁾ bringing to an end our discussion of works concerned with particular flower images. Annie Barnes, however, in a general analysis, points out that the flowers in Combray have a paradisaal quality, whereas those found in society are fashionable and artificial. ⁽⁵¹⁾ a point, we may add, which holds true on detailed analysis for all of Proust's flowers, some of the Combray flowers, as we shall see, undergoing a symbolic metamorphosis when they are transplanted to a more sterile setting.

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- (49) Viers, Rina : Evolution et sexualité des plantes dans 'Sodome et Gomorrhe', Centenaire de Marcel Proust (1971).
- (50) Paques, Jeannine : De 'Jean Santeuil' à 'la Recherche du Temps Perdu' : le coquelicot, Cahiers d'analyse textuelle, no. 6 (1964), pp. 59-69.
- (51) Barnes, Annie : Le Jardin de Marcel Proust : Pour le cinquantième des 'Jeunes Filles en Fleurs', Modern Language Review, 64, no. 3, (July 1969).

The critics, then, who deny any true symbolism or planned structure in Proust's works certainly have their challengers. A majority of the latter discovered the structure and meaning of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu through flower and related colour imagery. However, although, as we have mentioned, there are many articles which discuss flower imagery, however peripherally, the hawthorn is the only image to receive widespread and detailed attention, and up until Rina Viers' recent and excellent article, of all the wealth of Proust's other flowers, only the lilacs, the orchid and the poppy have articles devoted to them, whilst the cattleya receives a very shrewd mention in W. S. Bell's Un Amour de Swann : A Voyage to Cythera. No full length books have yet given the flower imagery as thorough analysis as, for example, Germaine Brée's study of bird imagery. Thus we can agree with Nicolas when he says "Il nous a semblé d'autant plus intéressant d'aborder l'oeuvre de Proust au point de vue de la nature que les études sur ce thème sont assez rares comparativement à la masse d'ouvrages consacrés à la passion et à la méditation" (52).

This thesis, then, chooses as its main concern flower images. Of course, with such a topic in mind, our study cannot ignore the blossoms of flowering trees - indeed the hawthorn, although strictly speaking a shrub, is considered a tree in Celtic and related mythologies. Also important to our analysis is the pollen of the pine tree, especially

(52) Nicolas, François-Xavier : Du côté de la nature et du côté de l'homme : principes d'une étude thématique, Centenaire de Marcel Proust, p. 74.

in its association with the orchid and Proust's discussion of different modes of fertilization in nature. In fact, the creative functions of many plants seemed to have fascinated Proust, and come, thus, well within the compass of this discussion.

It is interesting to speculate just why Proust did choose flowers as the most common source of metaphors and symbols in his work. Francis Fardwell suggests that Proust's assimilation of the human to the vegetable symbolizes a passive attitude towards life. (53) Actually, the attitudes of various characters in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu who think of people in terms of flower or plant imagery seems to show a certain insecurity, if not misanthropy. Marcel's deep insecurity and lack of trust in Albertine causes him to prefer her when she is asleep - a passive thing, rooted, unable to escape him in space or time. "Je lui trouvais l'air d'une longue tige en fleur ... elle était devenue une plante ... En le (sic) tenant sous mon regard, dans mes mains, j'avais cette impression de la posséder tout entière que je n'avais pas quand elle était réveillée" (P., pp. 69-70). Swann, similarly, often reduces the women he loves to the level of things - a rose in the case of his young working-girl mistress (C. S., p. 218), a figure in a picture by Botticelli in the case of Odette. He collects people in the same way that he collects pictures. He carefully chooses 'social bouquets' of people to mix harmoniously at garden parties (J. F., p. 521). Strangely enough, this image of the rose often recurs in A la Recherche

(53) Fardwell, F. V. : Landscape in the Works of Marcel Proust, p. 161.

du Temps Perdu when characters wish to manipulate others, as though manipulation were as common to Proustian love as the symbol of the rose is to the traditional idea of love. Odette, for example, soon plays Swann "la Valse des Roses ou Pauvre Fou" (C. S., p. 236). Marcel wishes to 'train' Albertine as he would a rose tree (P., p. 382). And, much later, after he has found his vocation as an artist, Marcel toys with the idea of feeding his imagination with love affairs with young girls, as did Bergotte; a rarefied diet to be compared to that of the famous horse who ate nothing but rose petals (T. R., p. 987). In fact, it is a common trait of Proustian lovers that they appreciate their beloved in terms of some need satisfied - aesthetic in the case of Bergotte, Marcel and Swann, monetary in the case of Odette. Never do they love a person for him or herself. When Albertine dies, for example, Marcel must admit that he really scarcely knew her. "Et ç'avait peut-être été mon tort de ne pas chercher davantage à connaître Albertine en elle-même " (F., p. 495).

The Duchess of Guermantes, treated unkindly by her husband and bored by Society, says that she finds the marriages of flowers, pointed out to her by Swann, much more interesting than human ones. Charlus, though, turns to nature only as an excuse to 'cultivate a human plant' (C. G., p. 285). Yet he, too, wishes to be the manipulator, or, as he terms it, the gardener who cultivates the young 'plant'.

As an artist Proust has a much more positive attitude towards flowers than those shown by his characters. He obviously loves them for

themselves, and also for the aesthetic dimensions they add to his work. Their beauty inspires some of his best descriptive passages. As Rina Viers points out, he is aware of the mythological, religious, folklore and artistic associations behind many of his flower images, shown, for example, in his reference to the temptresses, or 'les femmes-fleurs', in the legend of Parsifal ⁽⁵⁴⁾. There is also some evidence that Proust understood the importance of trees in various mythologies, for he refers to the Celtic belief that souls can, after death, become trapped in trees (the true Celtic belief, we might add, was concerned with shape shifting - the living person changing or being changed in shape - rather than metempsychosis). Proust also feels a tremendous attraction to three trees which seem to recall an incident in childhood, and which remind him of Norns - a suitable mythological choice, as the three Norns represented time past, present and future in Norse mythology. It is possible that Proust chose their place name - he calls them the three trees of Hudimesnil - because of its Teutonic ring (Hvergelmir being the sacred fountain, Urd one of the Norns, Yggdrasil the sacred tree). We shall see later that Proust had an eye not only for the mythological symbolism of flowers and trees, but also for the mythological significance of gardens, kingdoms and countrysides as a whole.

However, most of all, Proust uses flowers to present and analyze human problems, to act as a foil to many of his characters and provide

(54) Viers, Rina : La Signification des fleurs dans l'oeuvre de Marcel Proust, Bulletin § 25, p. 158.

clues as to their true personalities in an amoral context. Thus, Proust, through the metaphor of the bee and the orchid and the further example of the bisexual vanilla plant, can present the courtship of Charlus and Jupien, despite the nineteenth-century hostility to homosexuality, as a 'natural' and even beautiful phenomenon. Proust's positive attitude towards homosexuality, like his appreciation of the beauty of the at first glance repulsive jellyfish, was not easily reached as we shall see when we trace the use of flowers and landscapes throughout his works. Nor was his acceptance of nature's flux easy, as we can see in the melancholy emphasis on death in Proust's earlier works such as Les Plaisirs et les Jours. Marcel, too, must struggle to overcome the repulsion that he feels when he sees in the ugly wrinkled faces of the mothers or aunts of "les jeunes filles en fleurs" a clear reminder that girls, like flowers, do not retain their bloom for long. However, by the end of the book, Marcel has come to prize the ageing faces that show proof of maturity instead of a falsely retained, sterile youthfulness or the blankness of untested youth. Marcel's journey towards maturity, which may well parallel Proust's, and his subsequent acceptance of Time and change, we will trace through Proust's flowers.

However, before we do follow the development of Proust's flower imagery from his earlier to his later works, let us first tackle the second criticism of Proust's work. The first, that Proust's books lacked coherent structure, we have already introduced in the light of the pattern formed by his flower symbols. The second criticism, that Proust was hopelessly nostalgic, can be answered by a similar examination; after

all, as we have just suggested, Proust could not truly love flowers if he could not accept their ephemeral nature. That Time gave them value was rather a philosophic than a nostalgic assertion. For Time gives an important aesthetic dimension to Proust's 'landscapes'; as we shall see.

There were, none the less, enough people who knew Proust personally, 'le petit Proust' of the Ritz, and who insisted on his nostalgia and frivolousness for Proust to be quite apt in choosing as the theme of Contre Saint-Beuve the tenet that an author's works were not to be judged in terms of his private life, that in fact, the artist was superior to the man. Many of Proust's friends, whether they actually provoked this judgement or not, could have profited from the advice. The title of Edmée de la Rochefoucauld's article, for example, gives us a very good idea of how she saw Proust - Marcel Proust l'Evadé, ou l'Horreur du Temps. She says in this paper that Proust sought to prolong the nostalgia of his childhood at Illiers, and that he lived in a child's world. ⁽⁵⁵⁾ Paul Becquart believed that Proust never got below the surface of life. ⁽⁵⁶⁾ There is some evidence that Gide, too, was adversely influenced by Proust's reputation as a dilettante, although he soon became much more interested in the way in which Proust

(55) de la Rochefoucauld, Edmée : Marcel Proust l'Evadé ou l'horreur du temps, Hommage à Marcel Proust, Dec., 1952, le disque vert, Paris-Bruxelles, p. 31.

(56) Becquart, Paul : Le Prisonnier, Hommage à Marcel Proust, p. 131;

Here we must remember that by searching deep within himself, Proust 'regained' his childhood existence.

tackled his search for truth. Clive Bell remarks that Proust was not generally understood in France, because he was considered to be too much a frequenter of the Faubourg Saint-Germain and because his Jewishness was suspect. (57).

The idea of a nostalgic Proust is, however, much more prevalent in common opinion than in literary criticism, where, as we shall see, there are more than enough critics to testify to Proust's attempts, expressed through the 'quest' of Marcel, to search for the truth, no matter how hurtful it may be, rather than to seek comfort in the past. Nostalgia, the quality particularly associated with Proust by Edmée de la Rochefoucauld, is defined as a sentimental longing for the past, or, in Proust's case, according to the same lady, for childhood. Yet, when we read Rosalie Taylor's excellent article The Adult World and Childhood in Combray, we see that, no matter how easily the facts of Combray life are accepted by the young Marcel, or how neutrally they are presented by the narrator, Combray (and by analogy, Proust's model, Illiers) was not a paradise. The adults were narrow-minded and rigid in their responses. (58), the grandmother obsessed, strangers were unwelcome. (59). The keynote of the whole social atmosphere, indeed, was a lack of tolerance. Some of the most ugly incidents in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu occur in Marcel's childhood Combray. The family teases

(57) Bell, Clive : A Footnote, Marcel Proust, an English Tribute, Chatto & Windus, London, 1923, p. 84.

(58) Taylor, Rosalie : The Adult World and Childhood in Combray, French Studies, xxii, no. 1, (Jan. 1968), p. 26.

(59) Ibid, p. 27.

the grandmother unmercifully, and one member even threatens to bring an indictment against her. Françoise shows great cruelty towards the pregnant kitchen maid, although the description of the girl's painful problems in a medical book can move her to tears. Marcel's childhood cannot be taken as a photocopy of Proust's, but its source is in Proust's own childhood experiences, to which he can be said to have paid a very unsentimental tribute in Du Côté de Chez Swann.

Rosalie Taylor adds :

Proust was nevertheless aware of the profit and loss involved in the development of human personality. Thus, it is openly recognized in Le Temps Retrouvé, and already clearly implied even amidst the nostalgia for the loss of the child's sense of wonder in Combray, that the child's imaginative impressions were distorting or were incomplete, through lack of knowledge (60).

We might add that Marcel regains this sense of wonder and relives his first impressions of some of the Combray flowers in Le Temps Retrouvé; he recaptures what he had lost when he discovers his vocation as an artist. Then, too, the hawthorns, for example, serve to emphasize the often ludicrous nature of nostalgia which becomes sheer sentimentality; both Marcel's tearful farewell to his beloved Combray hawthorns and Françoise's lament over their loss Proust, quite aware of the underlying self-pity, records with gentle humour.

But we are anticipating. Other critics - Catherine Carswell (61), Clive

(60) Ibid, p. 35.

(61) Carswell, Catherine : Proust's Women, Marcel Proust, an English Tribute, p. 67.

Bell ⁽⁶²⁾, Le Clézio ⁽⁶³⁾, and Francis Birrell ⁽⁶⁴⁾, for example, all extol in Proust a passion for truth which seems at odds with his reputation for nostalgia. Barbara Thibaudeau points out the dichotomy which could exist between the artist and the man ⁽⁶⁵⁾ : "Quand il s'agit d'écrire, on est scrupuleux, on regarde de très près, on rejette tout ce qui n'est pas vérité. Mais tant qu'il ne s'agit que de la vie, on se ruine, on se rend malade, on se tue pour des mensonges" (T. R., p. 909). Yet, Stephen Hudson, a friend of Proust's remarks that lies tired Proust, and that Proust's insistence on truthfulness and sincerity caused him more than once to renounce lifelong associations ⁽⁶⁶⁾. To Proust's concern for truth, Claude Mauriac, though not so concerned with morality as his father, paid a justified left-handed compliment in his article Un Croyant sans la foi ⁽⁶⁷⁾. Indeed, in his search for truth, many critics claim to see a moral impulse at work in Proust. Elliot Coleman says : "it seems to me that in his unflagging and almost undeviating search for meaning, reality, and rightness of interpretation,

(62) Bell, Clive : Proust, Marcel Proust, Reviews and Estimates in English, p. 123.

(63) Le Clézio, J.-M., G. : Sa passion, la vérité, Le Figaro Littéraire, no. 918, (21 Nov. 1963), p. 26.

(64) Birrell, Francis : The Prophet of Despair, Marcel Proust, an English Tribute, p. 26.

(65) Thibaudeau, Barbara : Condemned to Lie, Proust, Yale French Studies, 1965, pp. 56-63.

(66) Hudson, Stephen : A Portrait, Marcel Proust, an English Tribute, p. 10.

(67) Mauriac, Claude : Un Croyant sans la foi, Hommage à Proust, p. 120.

his work becomes highly moral" (68). This, however, should not be taken to mean that Proust investigates the truth about himself and his characters in order to judge them. As Aschkenasy-Lelu says : " 'Comprendre', tel a toujours été le but essentiel, comme la plus grande satisfaction de Proust. Il n'est pas de bonheur réel que celui de la connaissance" (69). And Henri Bonnet expresses this idea even more succinctly when he says in his article L'Eudémonisme Esthétique de Proust : "L'eudémonisme est la philosophie morale qui fonde le bonheur sur la connaissance, la connaissance la plus profonde" (70). Proust himself, in a criticism of Ruskin, who could be a very didactic writer, substantiates M. Bonnet's claim. To Proust, Truth is the greatest 'good', followed by its necessary companion, Beauty. Last, and certainly least, comes the Ethical 'good' which, so often, by its rigorous judgements, destroys the harmonious partnership of the other two qualities. Thus, when Ruskin disparages the beauty of Venice as a product of the decadence and corruption of the times, Proust says :

Les doctrines qu'il [Ruskin] professait étaient des doctrines morales et non des doctrines esthétiques et pourtant il les choisissait pour leur beauté. Et comme il ne voulait pas les présenter comme belles, mais comme vraies, il était obligé de se mentir à lui-même sur la nature des raisons qui les lui faisaient adopter. De là une si incessante compromission de la conscience que les doctrines immorales sincèrement professées

(68) Coleman, Elliott : The Golden Angel, Coley Taylor, Inc., New York, (1965), p. 5.

(69) Aschkenasy-Lelu : Les Sens mineurs chez Proust, Bulletin 89, p. 66.

(70) Bonnet, Henri : L'Eudémonisme Esthétique de Proust, Entretiens sur Proust, Mouton & Co., Paris-La Haye, 1966, p. 8.

auraient peut-être été moins dangereuses pour l'intégrité de l'esprit que ces doctrines morales où l'affirmation n'est pas absolument sincère, étant dictée par une préférence esthétique inavouée. (71)

It may even be that Proust was following his own advice when he extolled the beauty of the relationship between Charlus and Jupien, trying, as he conceived it, to break down his readers' instinctive (as in the case of the jellyfish) or moral (as in the case of homosexuality) prejudice against things which reveal their beauty once they are understood. Proust may have thought that Truth and Beauty could do without ethical Good. "Il n'y a pas à proprement parler de beauté tout à fait mensongère, car le plaisir esthétique est précisément celui qui accompagne la découverte d'une vérité " (72). The rest of this passage is well worth reading, too, as it shows that Proust's definitions of truth and aesthetic beauty are by no means crude, and that he feels the relationship between the two to be mysterious in an almost religious sense. Girard recognizes the importance of this philosophy as the unifying principle in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu : "This universality is the fruit not of a weak eclecticism but of an authentic synthesis in which beauty and truth, so often enemies in art of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are reconciled." (73). However, we must add that Proust felt Truth to be by far the more important of the two. Beauty could tempt the susceptible artist into the 'sin' of

(71) Proust; Marcel : John Ruskin, Mélanges, Editions Gallimard, 1971, p. 130.

(72) Ibid, p. 132.

(73) Girard, René, N. : Introduction, Proust, a collection of essays, Twentieth Century Views, Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentiss Hall, 1962, p. 12.

idolatry, a sin Proust discovers in Ruskin and which becomes the tragic flaw of Swann. Indeed, Proust can talk of 'sin' in the context of art, for he came to regard all great art as morality.

Plus je pense aux théories de Ruskin et de Whistler, plus je crois qu'elles ne sont pas inconciliables. Whistler a raison de dire dans Ten O'Clock, que l'Art est distincte de la Morale. Et pourtant, Ruskin émet aussi une vérité, d'un autre plan, quand il dit que tout grand art est moralité. (74)

Thus, we can start our discussion of Proust's otherwise non-moralizing 'human landscape', (son paysage moral), with a passage describing a 'sin' very akin to selfishness. We will re-quote this passage in the Hawthorne chapter.

C'est le péché intellectuel favori des artistes ... Il n'est pas dans la nature de forme particulière, si belle soit-elle, qui vaille autrement que par la part de beauté qui a pu s'y incarner : pas même la fleur du pommier, pas même la fleur de l'épine rose ... Mais même envers elles, envers elles si peu littéraires, se rapportant si peu à une tradition esthétique ... je me garderai toujours d'un culte exclusif qui s'attacherait en elles à autre chose qu'à la joie qu'elles nous donnent, un culte au nom de qui, par un retour égoïste sur nous-mêmes, nous en ferions "nos" fleurs, et prendrions soin de les honorer en ornant notre chambre des oeuvres d'art où elles sont figurées ... Je ne collectionnerai pas les images de l'aubépine. Je ne vénère pas l'aubépine, je vais la voir et la respirer. (75)

Thus, the Hawthornes and apple trees tempt Proust to the one 'sin' which he recognizes as such, that of idolatry, worshipping the object which inspires the work of art, feeling that one can own beauty. This 'sin' is peculiar to artists and intellectuals, and leads to sterility, as in Swann's case. Instead of creating a work of art, Swann collects pictures

(74) Proust, Marcel : Lettres à une amie (Marie Nordlinger), Manchester, 1942, p. 85. As quoted by Richard Ellmann, in Golden Codgers, Oxford University Press, London, N. Y., Toronto, 1973, p. 59.

(75) Proust, Marcel : John Ruskin, Mélanges, pp. 136,7.

and women who remind him of pictures; he even gathers people together into aesthetically pleasing 'social bouquets'. Jean Santeuil, on the other hand, shows the true poet's nature when he feels "un plaisir moral", ⁽⁷⁶⁾, that is a real human pleasure, on recognizing the apple blossoms appearing to him like old friends. Marcel, too, can enjoy the essential beauty of a certain landscape, can gain from it a joy which he associates with human festivals based on the return of spring, when he comes across an apple orchard in full bloom. By regarding people as flowers or insects Marcel, far from wishing to place them in a pattern aesthetically pleasing or otherwise, frees his mind from the restrictions of having to judge others by accepted moral standards. Hence, despite Proust's own very clearly neutral use of the term "un paysage moral" in the French sense of a tableau which throws light on human behaviour, we have chosen to discuss 'the human landscape' in Proust, since the English term 'moral landscape' would be quite misleading. Marcel and Proust, then, both feel free to indulge "Cette ... curiosité de naturaliste humain" (J. F., p. 807). However, in Proust's private mythology, concerning Marcel's quest to become an artist, Marcel himself is not totally impervious to the sin of idolatry. Marcel does wish to possess, to own, 'les jeunes filles en fleurs'; he begins to think of Albertine as, partly, of his own creation (P., p. 129) and he only barely overcomes his final temptation (at the Guermantes' last reception) to worship Gilberte's daughter as the embodiment of youth.

(76) Proust; Marcel : Jean Santeuil, Librairie Gallimard, 1952, Vol. 1, p. 137.

In Contre Sainte-Beuve, then, Proust expresses his appreciation of Baudelaire and his poetry (and his dislike of judging art by the personal foibles of the author) thus : "C'est notre raisonnement qui, dégageant de l'oeuvre du poète sa grandeur, dit : c'est un Roi, et le voit Roi, et voudrait qu'il se conduisît en Roi. Mais le poète ne doit nullement se voir ainsi, pour que la réalité qu'il peint lui reste objective et qu'il ne pense pas à lui" (77). For the poet's kingdom is not in his real life; he must create it in his work of art. Thus, the narrator says, in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu : "Chaque artiste semble ainsi comme le citoyen d'une patrie inconnue, oubliée de lui-même, différente de celle d'où viendra, appareillant pour la terre, un autre grand artiste" (P., p. 257). Those poets or artists who create nothing in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu own no place in a spiritual country, for "l'art est ce qu'il y a de plus réel, la plus austère école de la vie, et le vrai Jugement dernier" (T. R., p. 880). And a king or a prince must work for the good of his land (here his work); once again, as in his discussion of 'idolatry', Proust suggests that the artist must not think of himself alone, in order to retain his objectivity.

Baudelaire, of course, need not run the risk of being one of the dispossessed; his work, according to Proust, forms a homogeneous landscape :

(77) Proust, Marcel : Contre Sainte-Beuve, Sainte-Beuve et Baudelaire, Editions Gallimard, 1971, p. 249.

Mais peu à peu, en négligeant celles (les images) qui sont trop connues (et qui sont peut-être les plus essentielles), il me semble que je pourrais commencer, forme par forme, à t'évoquer ce monde de la pensée de Baudelaire, ce pays de son génie, dont chaque poème n'est qu'un fragment et qui, dès qu'on le lit, se rejoint aux autres fragments que nous en connaissons, comme dans un salon, dans un cadre que nous n'y avons pas encore vu, certaine montagne antique où le soir rougeoie et où passe un poète à figure de femme suivi de deux ou trois Muses, c'est-à-dire un tableau de la vie antique conçue d'une façon naturelle, ces Muses étant des personnes qui ont existé, qui se promenaient le soir à deux ou trois avec un poète, etc., tout cela, dans un moment, à une certaine heure, dans l'éphémère qui donne quelque chose de réel à la légende immortelle, vous sentez un fragment du pays de Gustave Moreau. (78)

Baudelaire's poems offer the framework for a mythological landscape, as can a salon. And, indeed, in the last reception at the Guermantes, Marcel will feel himself to be in such a landscape, as though climbing a hill in the company of Odette (the mother of his first love), Gilberte (the love of his idealistic youth) and her daughter (whose youth tempts him to idolatry). As Marcel says : "L'esprit a ses paysages ... J'avais vécu comme un peintre montant un chemin" (T. R., p. 1035). And, as for the other 'frame', that which encloses a picture, we will see in the lilac chapter Proust's fascination with the mythological landscapes of Moreau's paintings and his concept of the poet, worshipped by the crowds. The artist as supreme creator we can see in the character of Elstir :

Naturellement, ce qu'il avait dans son atelier, ce n'était guère que des marines prises ici, à Balbec. Mais j'y pouvais discerner que le charme de chacune consistait en une sorte de métamorphose des choses représentées, analogue à celle qu'en poésie on nomme métaphore, et que, si Dieu le Père avait créé les choses en les nommant, c'est en leur ôtant leur nom, ou en leur donnant un autre, qu'Elstir les recréait (J. F., p. 835).

(78) Ibid, p. 255. The underlining is my own.

It is difficult to know the actual extent of Proust's factual knowledge of various mythologies, but there is no denying his grasp of their general significance, especially in the passage from Contre Sainte-Beuve. His allusions have unerringly picked out some of the most important ideas about the role of the poet in Greek and Celtic mythology. The Greeks worshipped the Muse or Muses, depended on them for inspiration (often a real woman would take over the Muse's role), perhaps reflecting in this idea an earlier religion of the earth mother which still seemed to symbolize the poet's true attitude towards Nature (this, at least, is the theme of Robert Graves' The White Goddess). The Celts had a tradition of poet-warriors and poet-priests which was at the basis of their culture. They also equated the well-being of the land with the well-being of the king. Proust in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu mentions poet-priests. The disparagement evident in the quotation is, most probably, not directed at the idea of the poet-priest but at the idea that the dilettante Saint-Loup (a prince who therefore ought to be a poet) should pick an actress to fill this role. (A poet - and Marcel is just at Saint-Loup's elbow - would make a much better choice).

"Et comme il (Saint-Loup) était imbu d'un certain langage qu'on parlait autour de cette femme dans des milieux littéraires : 'Elle (Rachel, the actress) a quelque chose de sidéral et même de vatique, tu comprends ce que je veux dire, le poète qui était presque un prêtre'" (C. G., p. 125).

In the context of the king standing for his land, that other main tenet of the Celtic mythology, Swann immediately comes to mind. The young

Marcel obviously worships Swann, linking him closely to his flowering park. However, when Swann commits the artistic sin of idolatry, his park continues to flourish. It is his symbolic garden, kingdom or landscape which suffers a drought, the kingdom of the artistic creation he might have produced. When he marries Odette, he gives up all endeavours to finish his criticism of Vermeer's paintings. In common with the Fisher King whose legend we discuss in detail in the Hawthorne chapter, Swann, giving in to love, finds that his creative powers desert him. The final chapter, which traces the progression of the psychological seasons in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, will also unroll the old Celtic drama of the young prince-poet (Marcel) taking over from the king (Swann). Odette, in this context, is sometimes seen as a priestess or even as a goddess (although, as we shall see, the latter allusion is almost certainly ironic) and there is a hint of Swann and Marcel being rivals (for the attention, however, not of Odette, but of Marcel's mother in the incident of the good-night kiss). Most of all, however, Odette represents a limited, biological tie with nature, whereas Swann hands on to Marcel the task of the poet with his particular, almost spiritual bond with nature, his need, if not his duty, to change nature into a work of art. Since Marcel makes much of 'carrying on Swann's name' (a task which Swann fondly leaves to his daughter, who betrays him by taking the name of Odette's next husband), the artistic task is thus seen as a mantle handed down as though from father to son. (Marcel is fascinated by Swann's hooded cape, "son manteau à pèlerine" (C. S., p. 415), a concession to fashion no doubt, on Swann's part, but a powerful

symbol in Marcel's eyes as he leads Françoise "en pèlerinage" (C. S., p. 416) past Swann's house). Or, in the biblical tradition, Swann can be seen as Moses leading Joshua (Marcel) to the Promised Land which he himself can never enjoy; this land, the landscape of his art, Marcel will reach and make fertile. The parallel between Swann and Moses, we must add, is made explicit by associating Odette (Mme. Swann) with Zephora, Moses' wife (C. S., p. 222). Marcel, then, has cause to be grateful to Swann and to Nature for the 'country' of his work, the components of his 'mental soil'. However, in return for the task of the artist and the inspiration needed to complete it, Marcel too, has something to give. To Swann, the light-weight self-styled 'artist of life' and the 'stem' of the flower of Marcel's book, and to the humble and ephemeral flowers of Combray, Marcel offers immortality. To Swann and to the Combray countryside Marcel retains the attitude of the humble chronicler facing the king. Yet, in the same vein as the poet who reminds the mistress who has acted as his muse that she will live on only because of his poems, Marcel offers both Swann and the flowers a longer life, or perhaps one ought to say reign, than they would have had without his book.

The metaphor of the countryside which Marcel observes and immortalizes as he would a king (remember the similar linking in Celtic myth of the land and the king) occurs first, and illustrates also the parallels Marcel feels between landscapes in nature and the flourishing landscape of the mind.

Les fleurs qui jouaient alors sur l'herbe, l'eau qui passait au soleil, tout le paysage qui environna leur apparition continue à accompagner leur souvenir de son visage inconscient ou distrait; et certes quand ils étaient longuement contemplés par cet humble passant, par cet enfant qui rêvait - comme l'est un roi, par un mémorialiste perdu dans la foule, - ce coin de nature, ce bout de jardin n'eussent pu penser que ce serait grâce à lui qu'ils seraient appelés à survivre en leurs particularités les plus éphémères; et pourtant ce parfum d'aubépine qui butine le long de la haie où les églantiers le remplaceront bientôt, un bruit de pas sans écho sur le gravier d'une allée, une bulle formée contre une plante aquatique par l'eau de la rivière et qui crève aussitôt, mon exaltation les a portés et a réussi à leur faire traverser tant d'années successives, tandis qu'alentour les chemins se sont effacés et que sont morts ceux qui les foulèrent et le souvenir de ceux qui les foulèrent. Parfois ce morceau de paysage amené ainsi jusqu'à aujourd'hui se détache si isolé de tout, qu'il flotte incertain dans ma pensée comme une Délos fleurie, sans que je puisse dire de quel pays, de quel temps - peut-être tout simplement de quel rêve - il vient. Mais c'est surtout comme à des gisements profonds de mon sol mental, comme aux terrains résistants sur lesquels je m'appuie encore, que je dois penser au côté de Méséglise et au côté de Guermantes (C. S., p. 183, 184).

This passage, by the way, might possibly be construed as nostalgic by some critics, for Proust goes on to say :

C'est parce que je croyais aux choses, aux êtres, tandis que je les parcourais, que les choses, les êtres, qu'ils m'ont fait connaître sont les seuls que je prenne encore au sérieux et qui me donnent encore de la joie. Soit que la foi qui crée soit tarie en moi, soit que la réalité ne se forme que dans la mémoire, les fleurs qu'on me montre aujourd'hui pour la première fois ne me semblent pas de vraies fleurs (C. S., p. 184).

However, if we look at this passage unsentimentally ourselves, it seems that Proust is making two reasonably objective points, one about the development of the individual, and one about style and vision, which Proust maintains to be the same : "le style pour l'écrivain ... est une question non de technique mais de vision" (T. R., p. 895). In other words, Proust's work is based on "le miracle d'une analogie" (T.R.,

p. 871), and most important analogies are those offered by Time - by the juxtaposition of an experienced and a remembered sensation, or, in the preceding passage, a real and remembered flower, produce of a real and a mental soil - "une métaphore" due "aux contingences du temps" (T. R., p. 889). We must add that this is the sole real miracle, except for the similar miracle of artistic creation, left to Marcel by the end of the novel. For Proust was well aware of the changes of viewpoint or vision which his young artist, like most people, must undergo; indeed, Proust thought at one point of dividing his novel into two parts, 'l'âge des Noms' (C. G., p. 10) and 'l'âge des Choses', a dichotomy we can still see in his two chapters on Balbec called 'Nom de pays : le nom' and 'Noms de pays : le pays'. The first age belongs, as Marcel might say, to "le temps heureux de ma croyante jeunesse" (C. S., p. 424), when a name served as the repository for all the beliefs Marcel wished to pour into it. Yet these beliefs, once proved false, could bring much unhappiness; thus, unless Marcel wishes to live in a fool's paradise, the joy they bring is not long-lived. The second age, the age of things, and it sounds as though the seemingly nostalgic passage on the Combray countryside may belong to this period, occurs once Marcel tries to see things as they are, without his imaginative childhood faith. However, in our discussion of the poet as creator (Elstir as poet/god) we have seen that a third age is possible, an age in which the mature artist may recreate the world by renaming it through visual or stylistic metaphors which Marcel regards as a human form of God's creation through the divine word; to

this age belongs true and lasting joy such as Marcel experiences on hearing Vinteuil's septet. This joy, moreover is unalloyed; once he has regained his 'faith' in art, Marcel is unlikely to lose it or to reexperience the unhappy disillusionment of the second age.

We can see this progression of viewpoints in studying Swann as a king-like figure.

Ma tante n'allait pas voir la haie d'épines roses, mais à tous moments je demandais à mes parents si elle n'irait pas, si autrefois elle allait souvent à Tansonville, tâchant de les faire parler des parents et grands-parents de Mlle Swann (Swann's daughter) qui me semblaient grands comme les dieux. Ce nom, devenu pour moi presque mythologique, de Swann, quand je causais avec mes parents, je languissais du besoin de le leur entendre dire, je n'osais pas le prononcer moi-même, mais je les entraînais sur des sujets qui avoisinaient Gilberte et sa famille. (C. S., p. 144).

Here, Swann, closely associated with his 'kingdom' Tansonville (of which Marcel says "certains lieux font toujours régner autour d'eux leur empire particulier") (C. S., p. 136), is more than a king, almost a god. His name, like the hidden name of God, is not to be spoken lightly (no wonder Proust felt that the first stage in Marcel's development was 'the age of names'). Later, Swann opens the door to Marcel's coming to know Bergotte - a gracious and kingly gesture, to fit in with his appearance.

je venais de m'installer parmi les amis du grand écrivain ... ayant passé par un couloir fermé aux autres. Si Swann me l'avait ainsi ouvert, c'est sans doute parce que, comme un roi se trouve naturellement inviter les amis de ses enfants dans la loge royale, sur le yacht royal, de même les parents de Gilberte recevaient les amis de leur fille au milieu des choses précieuses qu'ils possédaient et des intimités plus précieuses encore qui y étaient encadrées. Mais à cette époque je pensai, et peut-être

avec raison, que cette amabilité de Swann était indirectement à l'adresse de mes parents. J'avais cru entendre autrefois à Combray qu'il leur avait offert, voyant mon admiration pour Bergotte, de m'emmener dîner chez lui, et que mes parents avaient refusé, disant que j'étais trop jeune et trop nerveux pour "sortir" ... j'aurais souhaité que mes parents comprissent quel inestimable présent je venais de recevoir et témoignassent leur reconnaissance à ce Swann généreux et courtois qui me l'avait, ou le leur avait, offert, sans avoir plus l'air de s'apercevoir de sa valeur que ne fait dans la fresque de Luini le charmant roi mage, au nez busqué, aux cheveux blonds, et avec lequel on lui avait trouvé autrefois, paraît-il, une grande ressemblance (J. F., p. 572,3).

Not only is a king slightly lower on the mythological scale than a god, but also, here, Marcel the narrator moves the focus gradually away from Swann the generous to Swann the discerning and to the gifted child who is chosen as a recipient for kingly presents. (Is there a parallel here between Marcel and Jesus - also recognized by Kings (Magi) but underestimated by his parents?) The supposition that Marcel is just another of Gilberte's friends to share in her parents' bounty is soon dismissed, and we find Swann turning into a Magus, trying to convince Marcel's parents of the worth of their child. Later still, though yet conceding that "Swann était ... une remarquable personnalité intellectuelle et artistique ... bien qu'il n'eût rien "produit" ", Marcel knows that he will give Swann something perhaps more precious than life (we shall see that Marcel feels that much of his experience in life comes through Swann's influence) - immortality. "Et pourtant, cher Charles Swann, que j'ai si peu connu quand j'étais encore si jeune et vous près du tombeau, c'est déjà parce que celui que vous deviez considérer comme un petit imbécile a fait de vous le héros d'un de ses romans, qu'on recommence à parler de vous et que peut-être vous vivrez" (P., p. 200).

The 'humble passer-by', the dreaming child, (even although it is unlikely that Swann ever really saw Marcel as "un petit imbécile") has come a long way on the journey towards becoming a chronicler. The final passage on Swann shows how completely Marcel has taken over his artistic domain, the field or garden of art (we shall see Proust use this latter metaphor in Jean Santeuil), in which his novel will be a very fine flower indeed.

En somme, si j'y réfléchissais, la matière de mon expérience, laquelle serait la matière de mon livre, me venait de Swann ... Pédoncule un peu mince peut-être pour supporter ainsi l'étendue de toute ma vie (le "côté de Guermantes" s'étant trouvé en ce sens ainsi procéder du "côté de chez Swann"). Mais bien souvent cet auteur des aspects de notre vie est quelqu'un de bien inférieur à Swann

(T. R., p. 915).

Swann has definitely come down in Marcel's estimation, whilst Marcel himself is entering into his most creative period. It seems very unlikely that Marcel would really prefer to return nostalgically to those days in which Swann seemed a god or a king, and Marcel felt he would never have the willpower necessary to become a poet. Marcel is even quite willing to accept the suffering which he seems to think necessary to the task of the artist, in expiation of wrongs to his grandmother and to Albertine. In his mind, art and life are already merging - the experience of his life will be turned into a book; Swann, through his effect on Marcel, is the 'author' of certain aspects of Marcel's life in more ways than one.

We can see, then, that there are many dimensions to Proust's 'human landscape'. By adopting the objective attitude of the 'human naturalist'

the author can regard his characters from a point of view which does not depend on moral or aesthetic judgements. Thus, the relationship between Charlus and Jupien, like the strange sight of the Medusa jellyfish, cannot, from an objective point of view, be called ugly. However, in this 'human landscape' there is still the possibility of one 'sin' illustrated by some of Proust's characters, notably Swann and Marcel himself - idolatry, that is, worshipping an object (or a flower, the hawthorn for example) and collecting works of art in which they are depicted. This collecting is basically self-centered, and Swann, for example, does not stop at collecting pictures; soon he is collecting people who remind him of works of art. Without Marcel to immortalize him in his book, Swann, indeed would suffer the same fate meted out in Proust's landscape as that suffered by other failed artists, a fate similar to that which occurs in nature to certain sports; infertility and death with no hope of continuity within the species. However, other characters in Proust's novels show a more creative attitude to nature; to them the 'human landscape' can include trees and flowers which seem to join in man's celebration of, for example, the return of spring, as though joining in a joyful dance. At this point, we can start to see the mythological level of Proust's landscape; the way in which Swann and Marcel seem to act out the old drama of the young man taking over from the old, of psychological seasons following the progression of the seasons in nature. Time, then, is already an important element in Proust's landscapes, in the mythological figure of the Norns (the trees of Hudimesnil) and in the return of the seasons. But, in the work of art which grows out of Marcel's life, the truly magical flowers or trees or foods will be those which, by a metaphor in time, by evoking the past

in the present, will create a moment out of time.

We can see, then, that by the time Proust wrote A la Recherche du Temps Perdu (and to some extent Contre Sainte-Beuve and Jean Santeuil) he had a very sophisticated idea of the artist's relationship with nature. However, such a complex attitude had obviously been maturing in Proust for some time, as we shall see in tracing flower imagery and the 'human landscape' up to their final form in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. In his earlier works Proust shows evidence of a rather self-centered, melancholy Romanticism. In fact, the first example we find of a 'human landscape' in Proust is an allegory, the landscape representing the emotional state of the writer. Such an allegory may be seen as the logical (if extreme) conclusion of the Romantic 'pathetic fallacy', according to which the poet feels that nature is expressing his own personal mood. We will find, however, that Proust soon moves away from allegory, finally rejecting it altogether (and, actually, a good case may be made for regarding Allégorie, in spite of its name, as a parable). None-the-less, it is interesting to start our study of the development of Proust's 'human landscape' at its most primitive stage with this early, unpublished work called, simply, Allégorie.

Il y avait dans le pré un endroit si richement, si diversement fleuri qu'on avait coutume de l'appeler le jardin. Chaque jour il s'épanouissait davantage dans la joie de sa beauté et dans la bonne odeur de ses parfums. Un soir, un orage furieux arracha, puis emporta toutes les fleurs. Puis une pluie torrentielle tomba, glaçant le sol meurtri; tout ce qu'il aimait le mieux était parti, déraciné de son coeur même. Maintenant tout lui était égal, mais ce froid sans trêve, cette inondation folle, c'était la dernière cruauté. Cependant le vent prenait à poignées toute la

terre légère et la jetait devant lui. Bientôt la dernière couche résistante fut à nu, le vent n'eut pas de prise sur elle, mais l'eau ne la traversait pas, et c'était un jardin si imprudemment vallonné qu'elle ne pouvait s'en écouler, restait là. Et toujours elle tombait à torrents, noyant de larmes le jardin saccagé. Au matin, elle tombait encore, puis cessa; le jardin n'était plus qu'un champ dévasté couvert d'une eau trouble. Mais tout pourtant s'apaisait quand, vers cinq heures, le jardin sentit son eau calmée, devenue pure, parcourue d'une extase infinie. Rose et bleue, divine et malade, l'après-midi, céleste, venait se reposer sur son lit. Et l'eau ne la voilait ni ne la froissait nullement mais de tout son amour approfondissait peut-être encore son regard vague et triste et contenait, retenait tout entière, tendrement pressait sa lumineuse beauté. Et désormais ceux qui aiment les vastes spectacles du ciel vont souvent les regarder dans l'étang.

Heureux le coeur ainsi défleuri, ainsi saccagé, si maintenant plein de larmes il peut lui aussi refléter le ciel. (79)

This early text would, perhaps, not interest us if it did not contain many of the important themes, images, and details which we will discuss in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. The theme of the storm symbolizing regenerative suffering is paramount. The change of perspective from the earth, or things material, to the sky, or things intellectual or spiritual, follows the same pattern as Marcel's own quest. Pink and blue are the only two colours mentioned, both of which have importance in Proust's major novel, as do the perfumes of flowers. The linking of 'malade' and 'divine', the emphasis on nature's tears in sympathy with the unhappiness of the poet, and even the image of the pool, in which some observers at least might, like Narcissus, see only their own reflection, are somewhat self-indulgent. Then, too, the whole passage refers to the emotional experience of just one person. In A la Recherche

(79) Proust, Marcel : Allégorie, Textes non publiés par Proust, édition établie par Pierre Clarac avec la collaboration d'Yves Sandre, Gallimard, 1971, p. 177.

du Temps Perdu, the hero is not quite so introverted, and, while most of the storm imagery and a lot of the flower imagery trace his own development, a great deal of the flower imagery especially is devoted to the people who surround him.

In a similar rather Romantic vein, Proust dedicates another early text to the sea. His main theme is contained in his first sentence; "La mer fascinera toujours ceux chez qui le dégoût de la vie et l'attrait du mystère ont devancé les premiers chagrins, comme un pressentiment de l'insuffisance de la réalité à les satisfaire." (80). An even more melancholy role is attributed, in an excess of pathetic fallacy, to the moon in Sonate Clair de Lune. Watching the moon on the sea, a lover manages to move his previously smiling girlfriend to tears at the sight of his own vague sadness. "Alors nous comprîmes que la lune pleurait et que sa tristesse était à l'unisson de la nôtre." (81). Much of Les Regrets, rêveries couleur du temps is concerned with similar contemplations by moonlight; in Comme à la lumière de la lune, however, the narrator is alone and the pale indecisive light has become a part of himself;

L'amour s'est éteint, j'ai peur au seuil de l'oubli; mais apaisés, un peu pâles, tout près de moi et pourtant lointains et déjà vagues, voici, comme à la lumière de la lune, tous mes bonheurs passés et tous mes chagrins guéris qui me regardent et qui se taisent. Leur silence m'attendrit cependant que leur éloignement

(80) Proust, Marcel : La Mer, Les Regrets, rêveries, couleur du temps, Editions Gallimard, 1971, p. 142.

(81) Proust, Marcel : Sonate Clair de Lune, Les Regrets, rêveries, couleur du temps, p. 118.

et leur pâleur indécise m'enivrent de tristesse et de poésie. (82)
Et je ne puis cesser de regarder ce clair de lune intérieur.

Another piece describes a sunset (Coucher de soleil intérieur) as reflecting the thoughts of the watcher, reminding him of the suicide of a young friend (83). Thus, not only are these natural phenomena internalized, but they are also unremittingly associated with melancholy and even with death. Interestingly enough, Proust calls the night his sainted mother and the moon its sister (84).

We will not have much time to discuss the type of light Proust chooses to illuminate his landscapes in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, as we will concentrate on flower imagery in the bulk of this thesis, but a brief discussion of it here will give us an idea of the objectivity, poetic discipline, and affirmative outlook Proust had achieved by the time he wrote his major novel. Then, too, we will watch Proust's fictional hero repeating the mistakes made by Proust himself as a young artist, and moving on towards artistic maturity, as shown in particular by this light (and dark) imagery. To begin with, the moon no longer shares human feeling, although its light may favour furtive or deceptive behaviour. Proust talks of "la splendeur antique inchangée d'une lune cruellement, mystérieusement sereine, qui versait aux

(82) Proust, Marcel : Comme à la lumière de la lune, Les Regrets, rêveries, couleur du temps, p. 138.

(83) Proust, Marcel : Coucher de soleil intérieur, Les Regrets, rêveries, couleur du temps, pp. 137, 8.

(84) Proust, Marcel : Sonate Clair de lune, Les Regrets, rêveries, couleur du temps, p. 118.

monuments encore intacts l'inutile beauté de sa lumière" (T. R., p. 801). Still, in the moonlight, the little clique of the Verdurins encourages Odette's flirting with de Forcheville to the strains of the Moonlight Sonata. For the first time, Proust has mingled humour with moonlight, as seen in Swann's ridiculous soliloquy by moonlight, on his being deprived of this very opportunity to flirt aesthetically. The moon also shines over a lesbian incident in which Odette is involved and over the whole scene of the night Marcel steals with his mother. In fact, Marcel later describes the most important part of his life, his quest, if we wish, as stretching from "la nuit la plus douce et la plus triste de ma vie où j'avais ... obtenu de mes parents une première abdication d'où je pouvais faire dater le déclin de ma santé et de mon vouloir" to "le jour le plus beau" (T. R., pp. 886-7) on which an accidental similarity of paving once more flooded his mind with the sunlight of Venice recaptured from an incident in the past. The moonlight, then, is the light of deception, of failure, of, as Costil points out, illusion usually connected with love ⁽⁸⁵⁾. It is also, as Claude Vallée says, an example of "cette fascinante beauté du déclin des mondes, ces dernières lueurs les plus éclairantes" ⁽⁸⁶⁾ which washes over the destruction of the society Marcel used to know in wartime Paris. In other words, the moon is now a very complex symbol rather than a Romantic prop.

(85) Costil, Pierre : La Construction musicale de la Recherche du Temps Perdu, p. 484.

(86) Vallée, Claude : La Beauté laide, Bulletin 57, 1957, p. 330.

However, in the character of Marcel we can trace much of Proust's own change of attitude towards "la lumière du ciel moral selon les différences de pression de notre sensibilité" (T. R., p. 1045) in his human landscapes. To begin with, the young Marcel, like the young author of Les Plaisirs et les Jours, prefers melancholy to joyous landscapes, and works of art which inspire this mood. Thus, Marcel is at first suspicious of "la plus épaisse joie" (P., p. 250) of Vinteuil's septet. He is used to the paler Sonata, and finds the joyous theme of the Septet, which evokes the brilliance and heat of the midday sun, far too ugly. Nevertheless, he admires the verve and courage in a man whom he thought to be timid and whom he knew to be unhappy. Instead of brooding over 'internal sunsets' as does the narrator of Les Plaisirs et les Jours, Vinteuil has created two masterpieces, both, in their own way, full of hope; "ces deux interrogations si dissemblables ... c'était pourtant une même prière, jaillie devant différents levers de soleil intérieurs" (P., p. 255). Marcel is already moving towards an appreciation of sunlight and joy, however, since the other great artist of his acquaintance, Elstir, has, by his pictures, almost cured Marcel of his Romantic longing for the fog, tempests and mists at Balbec which various poets have led him to expect. Instead of viewing the ocean as a source of frantic stormy energy and as a symbol of death and eternity, Marcel comes to appreciate the calm but dazzling summer sea as a background to the human activity which it inspires. He no longer prefers "le royaume des tempêtes" or a dead sea "sous un linceul hivernal de brume" (J. F., p. 901), but "l'imperceptible reflux de l'eau, la pulsation d'une minute heureuse" (J. F., p. 902) which Elstir captures in his

canvases of the summer sea.

De sorte que si, avant ces visites chez Elstir, avant d'avoir vu une marine de lui où une jeune femme, en robe de barège ou de linon, dans un yacht arborant le drapeau américain, mit le "double" spirituel d'une robe de linon blanc et d'un drapeau dans mon imagination qui aussitôt couva un désir insatiable de voir sur-le-champ des robes de linon blanc et des drapeaux près de la mer, comme si cela ne m'était jamais arrivé jusque-là, je m'étais toujours efforcé, devant la mer, d'expulser du champ de ma vision, aussi bien que les baigneurs du premier plan, les yachts aux voiles trop blanches comme un costume de plage, tout ce qui m'empêchait de me persuader que je contemplais le flot immémorial qui déroulait déjà sa même vie mystérieuse avant l'apparition de l'espèce humaine, et jusqu'aux jours radieux qui me semblaient revêtir de l'aspect banal de l'universel été cette côte de brumes et de tempêtes, ... maintenant c'était le mauvais temps qui me paraissait devenir quelque accident funeste.

(J. F., p. 902).

We can see Proust's sympathetic amusement at the young Marcel who abandons a view of reality set by one school of art (Romantic) to adopt gravely that of another (Impressionist). Still, Marcel is moving away from solitary, melancholy, moonlit landscapes towards peopled, happy, sunny ones. He is beginning to appreciate the human aspect of nature and is also moving away from the traditionally feminine moon to the traditionally masculine sun. However, the symbolic trip from night to day is not a simple one; many of the most fascinating, ambiguous and unhappy incidents in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, such as Marcel's experiences of doubts and jealousy over Albertine, occur in twilight settings. The climax, of course, occurs in Le Temps Retrouvé, when, as we have mentioned, he vividly remembers the sunlit Venice of the past and finishes his journey from the saddest night of his life, when he felt he lost his vocation, and when his mother gave in to him, to the happiest day of his life, when he again became convinced of the worth of literature and of his own talents.

The Proust who wrote Les Plaisirs et les Jours, then, resembles the young Marcel in his preference for moonlight, his melancholy, his wish for solitude and his obsession with death. In most of the fictional pieces of this book, Proust kills off at least one character, usually for love. Not only are the countrysides morbid, but nature and her flowers seem possessed of a very intolerant moral code; actually of course, such an idea is the result of the puritanical conscience and sense of guilt felt by his protagonists, especially the heroine of La Confession d'une Jeune Fille. The lilacs which the young girl associates with her mother emanate a purity and innocence which, according to the girl, overcome the corruption in her own soul (87). However, when she does give in to temptation, the girl feels "Les bois, le ciel, les eaux semblaient se détourner de moi" (88). The mother, watching her daughter's transgression, suffers a heart attack and dies, and the girl commits suicide. In her deathbed confession, the image of the garden and the colours of remembered flowers also take on a moral symbolism. Perhaps Proust was capitalizing on both meanings of "les pensées" in the morning garden which could so easily symbolize the young girl's mind. The dark violet pansies (or thoughts?) are sad, the yellow ones mysterious, and the white ones have "une frêle innocence" (89).

(87) Proust, Marcel : La Confession d'une jeune fille, les Plaisirs et les jours, Editions Gallimard, 1971, p. 87.

(88) Ibid, p. 91.

(89) Ibid, p. 88.

In Jean Santeuil, Proust makes the transition from such gloomy, moralistic landscapes and isolated characters to landscapes bright with flowers which are important in themselves and a hero who, though at first very solitary, and always very egotistical, becomes very much concerned with the people who surround him. Proust's flower imagery becomes more detailed, and both his flower and storm imagery move away from allegory and towards metaphor. Colours begin to play a more important role. And, although Proust may not have attained the level of objectivity (often expressed by humour) of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu in this earlier novel, Jean taking himself very seriously indeed, this weakness is noticeable only in certain stylistic difficulties and not to any great extent in imagery taken from nature. To be exact, as B. G. Rogers points out, Jean Santeuil contains many examples of hero/narrator conflict, that is, a mixture of first and third person narrative, often in scenes discussing snobbishness or presenting some sexual ambiguity. ⁽⁹⁰⁾ We find, for example, that Jean's aristocratic friend, Bertrand de Réveillon is also a friend of the narrator's; Bertrand, in fact, distinguishes the narrator, or the author if we wish, for Proust is clearly being autobiographical here, by deserting all his other equally aristocratic friends, walking across the table tops in the crowded café, expressing by his gesture the thought, "J'ai beaucoup d'amis avec moi ce soir, mais ils savent que tu es mon ami préféré". ⁽⁹¹⁾ Then again, Proust uses the old convention of pretending

(90) Rogers, B. G. : Proust's Narrative Techniques, Librairie Droz, Genève, 1965, p. 55.

(91) Proust, Marcel : Jean Santeuil, Vol. 1, p. 295.



that his novel is actually not his own, but the unpublished manuscript of an anonymous but famous author ⁽⁹²⁾. Perhaps this is an attempt to create the illusion of a distance between himself and the novel. However, much more probably, this convention, along with the narrator's or author's identification with Jean's social success, both reflect a fear of rejection shared by Jean and his creator. After all, who would not accept a manuscript by a famous author or a friend of the Réveillons, who are time and again Jean's instrument of revenge against those who snub him?

Despite these stylistic weaknesses, the imagery and symbolism in Jean Santeuil, show more maturity, objectivity and variety than those in other earlier works. Flower, storm and related colour imagery illustrate expertly the central drama of rejection and, later, equally extreme success in Jean's life. In discussing Jean's miraculous acceptance by aristocratic society, René Girard points out the relative objectivity of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, whilst his mention of the image of the garden leads us towards a study of the symbolic strength of both novels :

Pursued by snobbish enemies, Jean Santeuil is always rescued at the last minute by protectors as well born as they are powerful; he therefore rises like a bright new star in the glittering firmament of society. One need not be a great psychologist to suspect that the Cinderella outlook of certain chapters reflects the irrational hopes and fears of a "snobisme" of which Proust has not yet divested himself ... All the barriers of society come crashing down at the feet of Jean Santeuil simply because he is a young man of remarkable talent and infinite charm, appreciated at his just value by almost equally talented and

(92) Ibid, p. 57.

charming aristocrats. "Snobisme" thus plays a lesser role in Jean Santeuil than in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu and is more vigorously condemned. On this ground, some observers have concluded that it is a "healthier" novel, more "rational" in its outlook on people and society. They also note that its world is "closer to ours". This last remark may well be true - but Jean Santeuil's apparent health and rationality stem from Proust's failure to perceive the irrational and magical elements of his own approach to reality ... Jean Santeuil is an ideal figure happily frolicking in the "enchanted garden" of Proustian metaphysical desire. (93)

Actually, even in Jean Santeuil, the hero does mature and his progression towards a rather less egocentric outlook on life is recorded in flower, storm and garden imagery. Then, too, the "gardens" which he desperately tries to enter are not all concerned with society - the family garden at night and the "useless" garden of poetry are both denied him as a child.

The main story of Jean Santeuil starts with this evocative phrase - "La petite porte du jardin se referma lentement sur le petit Jean qui était revenu une troisième fois dire bonsoir à sa mère et qui avait été mal reçu " (94). This incident, of course, is the first version of the scene of the goodnight kiss which is so important in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. Here, as much as for his weakness, young Jean is reproached by his parents for his desiring an artistic, non-practical career, a point to which we shall return later.

Thus, as in Freud's interpretation of the myth of Genesis, Proust subconsciously or consciously equates banishment from the garden with

(93) Girard, René : Introduction, Proust, p. 8.

(94) Proust, Marcel : Jean Santeuil, Vol. 1, p. 61.

parental disapproval. He is banished to his room - which, at a later point, he regards as a symbol for his self ⁽⁹⁵⁾. "Aussi quand Jean entra dans cette âme éparse autour de lui qu'était sa chambre, il ne faisait pour ainsi dire que rentrer en lui-même ou plutôt c'était sa chambre qui entra en lui avec toute la vivacité de la sympathie et la douceur de l'habitude" ⁽⁹⁶⁾. He becomes so comfortable in his safe isolation, that, at Etreuilles, he avoids both his cousins and the inviting flowers outside his window to return to his books. "Jean retombait dans sa lecture et dans l'anéantissement de son corps" ⁽⁹⁷⁾.

When he does explore the gardens at Etreuilles, Jean is delighted with the flowers, the sunlight, the whole countryside. It inspires him with dreams of an eternal paradise with his mother. "Jean pensait vaguement qu'on était arrivé enfin à ces jours où rien ne changerait plus, à partir desquels sa mère resterait éternellement jeune et lui éternellement libre et gai, dans le même soleil ardent immuablement établi sur la terre" ⁽⁹⁸⁾. Jean can easily imagine himself the son of a goddess ⁽⁹⁹⁾. A further passage describes the garden as a paradise inhabited by "Dieu le père" :

toutes ces fleurs ... semblaient comme les innombrables anges d'une sorte de Jour, comme ceux qu'ont représentés les grands peintres de la Renaissance, des anges peints d'un rose, d'un bleu, d'un orangé aussi vifs, les uns capucines, pois de senteur, volubilis semblant dans les airs se laisser glisser à terre en s'entrelaçant, les autres comme les violettes et les pensées à

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- (95) In an article called Les Sept Femmes de Gilbert le mauvais, Butor points out the importance of rooms (seven in number and associated with seven loves in Marcel's life) in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu.
 (96) Jean Santeuil, Vol. 11, p. 176.
 (97) Jean Santeuil, Vol. 1, p. 173.
 (98) Ibid, p. 197.
 (99) Ibid, pp. 193-4.

l'ombre dans la terre chaude semblant dormir ou paresser à terre, les uns entrelacés comme ici deux pensées gardant à l'ombre les plus merveilleuses couleurs de la lumière, les autres seules, dans toutes les poses mais toujours bienheureuses, donnant à qui les regards un bonheur inouï, l'idée que le jardinier est un bienheureux, que ce jardin est le paradis, mais ayant moins que ces anges des peintres l'air de célébrer cette joie que de la remédier, d'y participer ... Des papillons qui eux aussi gardent dans l'ombre des couleurs célestes vont d'une fleur à l'autre ... Et ces papillons, les petits oiseaux surtout qui s'ébattent en l'air, ou par groupes sont perchés dans les arbres, font penser aussi aux angelots ailés du tableau dont je parlais tandis que dans le ciel ouvert tout entier jusqu'au fond de son azur, le soleil trône comme Dieu le Père dans les rayons. Voilà le royaume heureux vers lequel les reflets du soleil faisant du ciel au jardin, du jardin à notre fenêtre, de notre fenêtre à notre vie une échelle heureuse, s'offraient à nous conduire. (100)

Note that when a garden has its 'goddess', she is associated with Jean's mother; however, no god is associated with his father.

Later, Jean borrows from Classical myths to see in 'le Jardin des Oublis' the garden of Apollo, with its horses and sun flowers (101).

However, despite these imaginary, kindly parental deities, it is obviously the flowers which attract Jean most, both as beautiful living things which remind him of certain works of art, and as "friends". Indeed, either through loneliness, or more probably, by preference, flowers become his best friends :

Et ce plaisir infini par lequel, nous promenant le long d'un verger, nous reconnaissons tout d'un coup ces fleurs blanches du pommier, ses feuilles et les bouquets roses de ses boutons, c'est un plaisir moral ... nous avons senti dans ces feuilles, dans ses bonnes fleurs blanches quelque chose qui nous parlait, comme quand nous rencontrons dans un défilé une personne aimée qui nous sourit, nous fait bonjour. Il semble que sous le vernis vert de la feuille, et sous le satin blanc de la fleur il y ait comme un être particulier, un individu que nous aimons et que personne ne peut nous remplacer. (102)

(100) Ibid, pp. 150-51.

(101) Ibid, p. 195.

(102) Ibid, pp. 137-8.

And later,

Jean n'avait jamais vu ou jamais remarqué l'arbre avant sa floraison, et n'avait jamais vu d'arbuste de cette sorte, (the camellia) jamais de grand arbuste aux innombrables fleurs rouges et roses, et il restait là devant lui comme devant une dame étrangère, belle, merveilleusement vêtue à qui son oncle l'aurait présenté et qui lui sourirait. D'autant plus que pour Jean les choses n'étaient pas encore l'une de beaucoup de choses du même genre, mais des personnes dont l'équivalent n'existait pas. Il ne se disait pas qu'il y avait dans le canal des cygnes mais les cygnes, et dans le terrain un camélia, mais le camélia. (103)

We will see later that Jean identifies as well with the solitary but not necessarily totally unique situation of the foxglove.

Jean's mother does not seem to share her son's pleasure in growing things, and, indeed, the hawthorn soon becomes a symbol of her lack of sympathy towards nature and (according to Jean) towards himself.

Peut-être sa mère, le jour où elle lui apporta la branche offerte par le jardinier, et qui admirait toute branche dans son salon ou sa chambre où il n'y en avait jamais, mais qui n'en aimait aucune et ne ressentait pas la grâce des animaux ni des plantes, et qui ce jour-là, d'un mot irraisonné, détourna au profit de l'épine rose, les flots d'amour et d'adoration dont était gonflé le coeur de Jean sans qu'il sût de lui-même les répandre et les conduire. (104)

Jean's mother rejects the hawthorn in another incident as well.

Quand Jean et sa mère quittaient Etreuilles, M. Sureau leur faisait couper de grandes bottes d'aubépines et de boules de neige, que Mme. Santeuil n'osait refuser. Mais dès l'oncle parti, elle les jetait, trouvant qu'on était déjà bien assez encombré en route. Et Jean pleurait de la séparation d'avec ces chères créatures, qu'il aurait voulu emmener à Paris, et de la méchanceté de sa mère. (105)

Actually, these two quotations are very interesting in the context of Proust's other works. In A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, we receive another version of a similar incident, recorded with much humour,

(103) Ibid, p. 209.

(104) Ibid, p. 206.

(105) Ibid, p. 207.

which shows some sympathy for a mother faced with the exaggerated emotions of her son :

ma mère me trouva en larmes dans le petit raidillon contigu à Tansonville, en train de dire adieu aux aubépines, entourant de mes bras les branches piquantes, et, comme une princesse de tragédie à qui pèseraient ces vains ornements, ingrat envers l'importune main qui en formant tous ces noeuds avait pris soin sur mon front d'assembler mes cheveux - foulant aux pieds mes papillotes arrachées et mon chapeau neuf. Ma mère ne fut pas touchée par mes larmes; mais elle ne put retenir un cri à la vue de la coiffe défoncée et de la douillette perdue (C. S., p. 145).

In both Jean Santeuil and A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, the hawthorns are an object of worship. In Jean Santeuil, they receive all the frustrated adoration he would give his mother, and they are also the flowers of the month of Mary ⁽¹⁰⁶⁾, decorating the church altar in May. Moreover, they form "les fines chapelles dentelées" ⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ which so delight Jean at Etreuilles. This love, if not adoration, of nature will become more important to the image of the hawthorns, as far as Marcel is concerned, than various ephemeral human loves, for example his for Gilberte and Mlle Vinteuil's for her friend. Thus, the focal point for worship of both of Proust's young heroes moves from the religious symbol of the Virgin mother, to her human counterparts - their own mother, the seemingly virginal Gilberte - and finally to nature, all through the image of the hawthorn.

The red, or pink, and white of the hawthorns also have a great deal of significance to Jean. As we shall see in our study of A la Recherche

(106) Ibid, pp. 204-5.

(107) Ibid, p. 210.

du Temps Perdu, red is associated with passion, love, and experience and white with innocence (this dichotomy occurs in traditional symbolism). Jean incorporates the symbolism of these colours into the drama of his rejections. Proust, however, has not yet worked out a cohesive pattern of images, as in his later work, which will link clearly flower, colour and storm imagery. Colours to Jean, as to Marcel, are very sensual, especially the particular tinge of pink of the hawthorns which is just the colour of the juice escaping from an apple pie. "on apportait seulement la grande tarte aux pommes, jaune comme la porte du magasin de nouveautés de la place, mais que voilait un jus rougeâtre comme les aubépines roses qui croissaient autour du portail de l'église" (108). Pink and white also remind him of the colours worn by a girl "en robe blanche avec une ceinture rose" (109). And pink is the colour of the hawthorn on which he lavishes all the love meant for his mother. White, on the other hand, is an innocent colour. The narrator talks of "la candeur des pétales blancs" (110). But more significant is the passage describing Marcel's being tucked in bed by his mother, a passage essential to tracing the theme of rejection, and associated, also, with the image of the garden :

Et qu'un jour vous sentiez seulement en prenant une serviette l'odeur fine du linge propre, et vous vous souviendrez de l'arrivée à la campagne, quand après le dîner votre mère vous couchait après vous avoir revêtu d'une fine chemise blanche, dans des draps blancs, la tête sur un oreiller blanc, la fenêtre donnant sur un petit jardin que vous ne pouvez pas voir à cause de l'heure où l'on était arrivé ... mais qui demain matin vous montrerait sa corbeille de pensées. (111)

(108) Ibid, p. 226.

(109) Ibid, p. 232.

(110) Jean Santeuil, Vol. 11, p. 45.

(111) Ibid, p. 227.

Interestingly enough, when Jean is later rebuffed by a girl he hopes to make his friend, he tries to return to a similar safe, innocent state, reminiscent of being tucked into bed by his mother :

Il faut aimer pour savoir qu'on n'est pas aimé. Quand on n'aime plus, on est toujours assez aimé, [muses Jean. His mother, of course, is the exception to the rule]. Il avait froid au cou. Il alla chercher un petit châle de tricot à sa mère dont pendant son enfance elle lui enveloppait les pieds quand il les avait froids. Il contenait beaucoup de cette tendresse réchauffante et de ce passé frileux entre ses mailles. Aussi ce fut comme une grande douceur, comme les bras mêmes de sa mère qu'il le passa autour de son cou. Il se figura avoir la tête appuyée, comme quand il était souffrant ou triste, sur le sein de sa mère, et ayant replié sur son corps l'aile blanche de son drap, il s'endormit (112).

Later, we shall see that Jean rather likes wearing certain articles of clothing borrowed from women, but here the return to the white bed is what we wish to emphasize.

The same dichotomy of colours can be seen in the passage in which Jean is rejected by the girl to whom he is saying goodnight in her room. Jean, like Marcel, does not have much luck when he demands kisses from women, but he takes his rebuff very seriously and Proust records the incident with none of the sense of humour which we will see in the same episode in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. In the Jean Santeuil version, the red and the white show sensuality and innocence, provocation and rejection. "il regardait cette figure fine et rose dans la vie, si pleine, si charnelle, si écarlate, posée sur les draps blancs, sous les cheveux défaits, où le regard semblait épier avec contentement son plaisir" (113). However, Jean would have done better to listen to the

(112) Jean Santeuil, Vol. 111, p. 250-51.

(113) Ibid, p. 257.

message of the white sheets rather than that of the rosy face, judging by the girl's reaction to his advances.

Our discussion of the imagery so far suggests that Jean did not consider his childhood particularly happy. In fact, when he expresses on one occasion a regret that one cannot relive one's childhood, he is motivated not by nostalgia, but by a desire to rectify the one, to his mind, real crime of his childhood, the incident of the good-night kiss and the capitulation of his mother ⁽¹¹⁴⁾. Yet, his isolation, the rejection and the strict rules of his parents seem to him in retrospect, to have formed a prison around him. When he becomes more mature, he enjoys a better relationship with his folks, but still looks back with bitterness, and, as we shall see later in the incident of the second kiss, with some jealousy towards his father. "Et comparant cette heureuse journée (with his mother) à son enfance prisonnière et qui ne connaissait de la famille que son esclavage, il sentait ... la douceur d'en être affranchi." ⁽¹¹⁵⁾ Jean's general comment on his childhood is that, after the incident of the kiss, "Alors la tristesse régnait seule sur sa sombre enfance." ⁽¹¹⁶⁾

Rejection by girl-friends is actually not typical of Jean's life as he grows older. He enters the successful part of his life, or the wish-fulfilment part of the novel, when he makes friends with the aristocratic Henri de Réveillon. He is invited to stay with the Réveillons, and he and Henri spend much of their time walking in the park and garden. For

(114) Jean Santeuil, Vol. 1, p. 70.

(115) Jean Santeuil, Vol. III, p. 288.

(116) Jean Santeuil, Vol. 1, p. 73.

once, Jean is allowed to enter a most exclusive garden, where he is far from lonely. Also, the example of Henri, an ordered, harmonious person, seems to have a moderating influence on Jean's romantic excesses. Jean finds himself moving away from the emotional, the poetic, the Romantic and the feminine - symbolized by Mlle des Coulombes who is attracted towards him because he is a poet and whom he rebuffs - towards order, science, harmony and masculinity symbolized by Henri.

Le poète adolescent maudit les qualités positives quand il ne les connaît que par un père qui à des heures qu'il ne connaît pas, lui, vient l'arracher durement à des occupations sublimes au moment même où elles l'élèvent si haut au-dessus de cette terre pour le ramener aux occupations vulgaires de la vie quotidienne.

(117)

Henri is interested literally in things of the earth - flowers and plants, he is not over-emotional, and is not obsessed either with love for his mother or with thoughts of death. "Il ne faisait pas à beaucoup de gens des protestations d'amitié, mais s'il aimait quelqu'un, il le lui prouvait constamment." "Son amitié pour sa mère n'avait rien de l'impuissante exultation de celle de Jean." "Il tenait beaucoup à la vie et ne pensait jamais à la mort." (118). He performs the same function as Vinteuil and Elstir in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu in showing the young hero the value of joy and influencing him away from a feminine and towards a more masculine sensibility. (In Jean Santeuil, of course, this dichotomy is seen in terms of his father and mother.) The tension between Romanticism and logic is voiced in terms of flower imagery. "Henri, comme nous l'avons dit, s'occupait de la botanique; l'étude de cette science, la collection d'un herbier répondaient d'ailleurs

(117) Ibid, p. 273.

(118) Ibid, p. 274.

également à son amour de l'ordre, à son besoin de marche, et à son goût pour la grâce." (119). Jean, less practical but more poetical, is lost in rather egocentric reverie at the sight of a lone foxglove trying to grow in inhospitable terrain. (In A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, Proust gives similar significance to a lone poppy, but here, it is important that he chooses a flower associated with heart ailments.) Death even enters into his reverie, but he is mostly impressed by the solitude of the flower. (120). Henri reassures Jean, telling him that the species is quite common. Since Jean identifies with the foxglove, he seems to take this reassurance personally, too, and, indeed, Henri's friendship seems to make him a less solitary person.

Ces paroles retentirent avec une sorte de solennité dans l'âme de Jean et il la regarde sans tristesse, si isolée comme fleur périssable, mais si grande comme type, si vaste dans la vie et comme pensée durable dans la nature. Et moi aussi, se dit-il, bien souvent je me suis senti isolé du reste du monde comme la pauvre digitale. Mais dans d'autres moments j'ai senti qu'il était plein de pensées pareilles à la mienne. (121)

Note here that Proust talks of a flower as being "une pensée durable dans la nature", and Jean by analogy, must also be something of a subjective phenomenon. Indeed, Proust says later in a similar idealistic vein, "Jean prenait secrètement en pitié tous ceux qui croyaient à la Science, qui ne croyaient pas à l'absolu du Moi, à l'existence de Dieu." (122) Jean's idea of a flower as being one of nature's 'thoughts' continues to make us wonder if Proust was punning on the French word for pansies and thoughts.

(119) Ibid, p. 274.

(120) Jean Santeuil, Vol. 11, p. 41.

(121) Ibid, p. 43.

(122) Ibid, p. 14.

The foxglove is the first flower Proust uses more than once for its symbolic value. It recurs in a very strange episode indeed. Jean visits a convent in order to make love to a nun whom Henri has found easy game. However, at the last moment, he changes his mind; Jean prefers to keep his women at a distance, as we shall see later, where they retain the provocative purity of his mother. Jean sees the nun as "une fleur poussée seule dans un rocher sauvage où elle mourra" (123). (She does die soon after) and he admires "la richesse de toutes les espèces, ce que la nature cache de variété dans son apparente uniformité, sentant une angoisse comme quand il avait vu la digitale dans le vallon où elle mourrait entre deux quartiers de roc qui ne l'avaient pas connue" (124). Perhaps we have here an unconscious association with an alternative name for the foxglove - "le doigt de la Vierge".

If the flower imagery is more sophisticated and detailed in Jean Santeuil than in previous works, so is the light symbolism and the storm imagery. We have already noted the importance of the sun in Jean's description of certain gardens. The Etreuilles garden Jean terms a 'kingdom' - and the sun which shines over it is 'Dieu le père' (125). 'Le Jardin des Oublis', also, is associated with a sun god, Apollo. But the main incidents of Jean's life still revolve around the symbol of the moon, and, although he does move slightly towards joy, as does Marcel, this progression is not associated with a sunny outlook, as with Marcel. The moon dominates three episodes concerning kisses - two rebuffs and a final acceptance

(123) Jean Santeuil, Vol. III, p. 265.

(124) Ibid, p. 267.

(125) Jean Santeuil, Vol. I, p. 151.

which are the cause of at least some of the unhappiness in Jean's life. These three scenes occur, as though consciously, near the beginning, middle and end of the novel. The first, of course, describes the incident of the good-night kiss ⁽¹²⁶⁾. By the moon's light, Jean can just distinguish the outline of his mother and her guests in the garden. His mother does come in to him, but only after (he feels) he has suffered for a long time. Jean talks of his mother's kiss in images of ritual food - the last communion and the funeral cakes of the Greeks ⁽¹²⁷⁾. The second kiss is that which his girl-friend with the rosy cheeks refuses him. Once again, the light of the moon is the sole illumination ⁽¹²⁸⁾. However, a certain metaphor which Jean uses when discussing love shows us that he actually wishes for the 'purity' and distance symbolized by the moon in his girl-friends, and reminds us that he had associated the moon with the image of his mother in earlier texts. Jean "allait voir Mme S. (a young widow) chez elle ... il y restait fort tard, et en revenant dans la nuit avait devant les yeux le profil pur et souriant, toujours à une même distance, de même qu'il avait à une même distance de sa voiture découverte, par les belles nuits brillantes, la face pure de la lune" ⁽¹²⁹⁾. Like many young people, Jean is more in love with love than with any particular person.

Mais cette absence d'espérance précise dans la personne retournant ses pensées sur la satisfaction qu'il y a à aimer, il jouissait plus de son amour que de son amante. Ainsi cette sensation amoureuse lui était peut-être plus voluptueuse et c'est ainsi qu'il y pensait comme à une sorte de plaisir plus vif que ceux qui jusque-là agrémentaient sa vie et par là lui rappelaient Stendhal, lui faisant considérer l'amour comme une façon infiniment plus agréable de goûter la vie et de trouver du charme ⁽¹³⁰⁾ à la solitude.

(126) Ibid, p. 68.

(127) Ibid, p. 66.

(128) Jean Santeuil, Vol. III, p. 256.

(129) Ibid, p. 122.

(130) Ibid, p. 123-4.

Thus, love only deepens Jean's solitude; still, the narrator sees the psychology of the situation quite clearly, a refreshing change from the sentimental melancholy indulged in by the narrator of earlier pieces when faced with his own solitude, often associated with a similarly melancholy moon. The third episode concerning the image of the moon, obviously a parallel to the first incident and the mother's good-night kiss, describes Jean grown-up and deferred to by his mother, who seems to regard him as a substitute husband while Jean's father is away. On coming home late one night Jean finds a note from his mother saying that he should come and say good-night to her and that he should order what he wishes for lunch the next day. Never before has she asked Jean to kiss her good-night for fear of disturbing Jean's father. Nor does she usually ask his advice over the menu, attentive only to the preferences of her husband. "Mais son mari parti, et tenant pour rien son sommeil, sa gourmandise à elle, elle était toute à son fils " (131). Jean tiptoes up to her room and chastely kisses the sheet tucked around her chin. "La douce lumière de la lune" (132) shines over the whole scene. There could scarcely be a better example of wish fulfilment arising out of the childhood rejection. In fact, we can scarcely wonder at Jean's later preference for widows. Notice that once again Marcel associates food with love. The moon, then, acts as a symbolic background for incidents in Jean's life. But it is no longer allegorical, nor does the hero regard it with pathetic fallacy. Watching the moonlight one night, Jean meditates on man's attitude towards the more dramatic phenomena of nature. "Nous nous penchons vers les choses avec avidité

(131) Ibid, p. 285.

(132) Ibid, p. 286.

comme si elles pouvaient nous donner, la mer sa force inépuisable, le vent son souffle, l'air sa pureté. Illusion qui enchaîne tant de malades dans les lieux sauvages où la nature est pleine de force, tant de penseurs épuisés là où il n'y a que des forces sans pensée, la mer aveugle, le vent sourd, les animaux qui ne pensent à rien" (133). The storm imagery in Jean Santeuil, then, is far more sophisticated, and far less Romantic than in earlier works.

One passage in Jean Santeuil, however, does have echoes of earlier works, the early Allégorie and the perhaps allegorical, but at the least moralistic, pansy garden in La Confession d'une Jeune Fille. However, the later passage places Jean in the changing scheme of things rather than demanding that nature revolve around him in sympathy with his moods :

Qu'est-ce donc que ces petites ombres noires flottant à terre sur le chemin rayonnant de soleil, comme les plantes sur une rivière, ces premières petites feuilles des lilas penchant leur tête délicate et douce entre le grillage des petits jardins de la banlieue, ces vastes arbres fruitiers, comme un enchantement blanc ou rose fleuri tout à coup derrière un mur comme l'apparition d'une beauté enivrante et fraîche, enveloppé dans sa grâce éblouissante et légère, qu'est-ce donc que tout cela sinon des témoins de nos premiers printemps, des reliques des souvenirs de nos premières émotions en face de la nature, mais qui n'ont rien perdu de leur pouvoir sur nous, qui nous ouvrent soudain notre coeur aux mêmes félicités délicieuses, qui nous font échapper aux années pour nous rendre à la nature, aux transformations mystérieuses de l'année qui baignent les choses et les événements autour de nous dans une sorte de vie plus grande qu'eux, que nous reconnaissons pour en avoir approché déjà autrefois, qui n'est pas dans notre jeunesse plutôt que dans notre vieillesse et qui pour un moment semble nous montrer le monde qui nous entoure non comme le monde médiocre, bientôt fini pour nous, tout humain et connu, mais comme un monde éternel, éternellement jeune, mystérieux, plein de promesses inouïs? Ainsi au fond d'un petit jardin on voit souvent s'approcher et se raidir des ciels violets ou noirs d'orages, bientôt dissipés comme des pays inconnus et repartis pour des voyages immenses, se reculer, se fondre des ciels safranés

(133) Jean Santeuil, Vol. 11, p. 193.

d'été radieux, s'étendre et se bomber au zénith bleu des gros nuages blancs qui flottent sur le travail des moissonneurs, ou des nuées grises qui font route avec les voyageurs, filant devant eux sur les chemins, ciels violets, ciels jaunes, ciels bleus, hôtes gigantesques, dieux passagers du petit jardin sur lequel ils étendent un instant leur lumière brillante et tremblante ou leur ombre glaciale, bleus, violets ou jaunes de la couleur des pensées qui semblent leur emprunter leur couleur et leur figure vague, des pensées qui s'éclairent à la chaleur de leurs soleils passants, ou tremblent à leur vent d'orage, précurseur des pluies qui les mouilleront. (134)

This passage situates man in nature on a far less egocentric footing than Proust had previously claimed. Although it may present the scene as a painting (hence the use of 'ciels' rather than 'cieux' - cf Baudelaire's 'ciels brouillés' in Invitation au voyage), at least Nature here is the 'artist'; the mood is not dictated by Jean, who is willing to appreciate each 'canvas' as it comes. It also illustrates Proust's penchant for parallels, the flowers compared to clouds, earth and sky in harmony. Also Proust is starting to emphasize colour and use it symbolically. Violet and black will now be the colours of storms emotional as well as meteorological.

In fact, Jean, like Marcel, progresses quite slowly towards a more mature and objective view of nature. When he is very young, he is very much at the mercy of his emotions and of the weather. He falls in love with a playmate whom he meets on the Champs-Élysées, but, when it rains, she is not allowed to play outdoors :

Jean s'aperçut ... la tristesse de ce ciel barré par un nuage noir ... où il semblait que ne dût jamais plus luire un rayon de soleil, comme dans le coeur de Jean une espérance, de cette pluie enfin qui tombait à gouttes aussi pressées que ses larmes, comme ne devant non plus jamais finir. Vous avez vu qu'il n'était pas habile à sortir de sa douleur ... Et alors il s'étonnait qu'une

(134) Jean Santeuil, Vol. III, p. 158-159.

tristesse en lui vînt s'unir au chagrin du ciel, comme petit enfant il s'était étonné que le ciel parût soucieux, puis désolé comme lui.

He prefers Verlaine's Il pleure dans mon coeur to Lamartine's Le Lac - a preference incomprehensible to his parents, who judge solely with their intelligence and not with emotions. "Mais l'intelligence et la sensibilité d'un enfant se développent irrégulièrement, au hasard d'un rayon de soleil et plus encore d'un orage." (135). Thus, Jean unites melancholy unhappiness in love (since he cannot meet his playmate) and pathetic fallacy in true Romantic fashion. On another occasion, Proust uses metaphor to describe in highly melodramatic terms a quarrel Jean has with his mother and father, who think Henri is a bad influence on their son. In actuality, Henri keeps Jean out of mischief - his other friends are far more likely to indulge in the 'orgies' which Jean's mother jealously credits Henri with initiating. Thus, Jean feels humiliated and unfairly judged when his mother writes a note to his friend declining on Jean's behalf an invitation from Henri. "Où s'étendait une forêt printanière sous un soleil matinal, maintenant, dans une obscurité d'éclipse, la mer déchaînée dans la tempête ne laissait pas penser que jamais la vie, le bonheur, l'espérance, la lumière puissent luire un jour de nouveau sur cette sinistre dévastation." (136) This very mixed metaphor is nothing if not dramatic. It reminds us of a metaphor Charlus uses for himself in a scene which Proust meant to be gently amusing, but also a little bit sad, since it shows the way in which Charlus diverts his artistic talents to somewhat ludicrous

(135) Jean Santeuil, Vol. 1, p. 90.

(136) Ibid, p. 303.

ends. Because of Marcel's rejection of his advances, Charlus feels his sympathy for the youngster cooling - killed off like the apple trees at Balbec which bloom too early in the spring and succumb to a late frost (C. G., p. 560) (a metaphor inspired by Marcel's poetic delight in these trees). Actually, though Jean may be seen as an earlier version of Marcel, the poet apprentice, his more ludicrous actions Proust invariably ascribes to characters other than Marcel in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu; thus, Jean's duel becomes Charlus' (C. G., pp. 1064-73), and Jean's opening and reading his girl-friend's letter Proust ascribes to Swann (C. S., pp. 281-285). All the artists of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, even Vinteuil with his illusion as to the fragility and purity of his daughter, have something of the 'wise fool', such as was Parsifal, in them. In this incident of Jean's quarrel with his parents, however, Proust does not seem to realize the ridiculous side of his hero's behaviour. In great chagrin, Jean breaks a vase his parents have given him. Then, to comfort himself by association with happier memories, he puts on an old mantle of his mother's. His father tells him that he is ridiculous both in his choice of apparel and in his over-emotionalism, but his mother, strangely, seems to approve. She says that she will regard the broken vase as a symbol of their indestructible union, as it is in the Jewish marriage ceremony (137).

Later, Jean again identifies himself with storms, as an image of rebellion rather than one of melancholy (138). And, when he finally

(137) Ibid, p. 315.

(138) Jean Santeuil, Vol. 11, p. 334.

gets the chance of witnessing a real storm, he finds himself at least as much intrigued by three of his travelling companions as he is by the storm. Although the storm is not a disappointment, the three mismatched travellers offer more to Jean's curiosity, introducing into Proust's work the constant theme of the deceptive nature of peoples' external appearance, and the truth of first impressions. In A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, Elstir will present landscapes (or seascapes) in a fashion which proclaims the truth of an impression, no matter how seemingly strange. His portrait of Odette as 'miss Sacripant' also conveys a true impression.

After he has been accepted as an adult by his parents and welcomed into aristocratic society, Jean is left with the entrance to only one garden denied him, partly by his parents and partly by his own weaknesses. This is the 'garden' of poetry. His mother (as well as his father) regards a career in literature as far too impracticable and precarious. "Frivole comme étude, mais noble comme plaisir, la poésie lui paraissait la fleur délicate des moments perdus (How ironical this pronouncement seems in terms of the theme of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu). Ainsi certains propriétaires paysans, quand un coin de leur terre n'est propre à devenir ni un champ, ni un potager, ni un verger, en font un jardin " (139). In the beginning scene of the novel, in the garden, Jean's parents discuss the unsuitability of a literary career for their son. At the end of the novel, they, along with M. Sandré, are still voicing the same doubts, only this time Proust records them with a great deal more humour. Jean's father, knowing that his son is at yet another ball, says,

(139) Jean Santeuil, Vol. 1, pp. 84-5.

"C'est la légèreté, la frivolité, l'amour du monde ... Hélas j'aimais mieux l'amour, j'aimais mieux la mauvaise santé, j'aimais mieux la poésie. Non, dit M. Sandré, je n'aimais pas mieux la poésie. Un gommeux est peut-être plus nul encore qu'un bohème. Mais c'est moins déshonorant pour la famille" (140).

However, despite his family's prohibitions, Jean is forever seeing in nature hints that his vocation should be writing, and that nature itself is a living poem. He talks of "la poésie éblouissante" (141) of the apple trees. And the pink and white hawthorns are to him a living example of metaphor :

Jean avait, entre toutes les fleurs qu'il avait devant lui sans les voir et sans les aimer, élu l'épine rose, pour laquelle, il avait un amour spécial ... Etait-ce que cet arbre est plus beau que d'autres, que les fleurs si composées et si colorées ont l'air de fleurs de fête, et qu'en effet souvent à l'église pendant le mois de Marie il en avait vu des branches coupées tout entières dans les vases de l'autel? Etait-ce qu'ayant vu auparavant de l'épine blanche, la vue d'une épine rose dont les fleurs ne sont plus simples mais composées le frappa à la fois de ces deux prestiges de l'analogie et de la différence qui ont tant de pouvoir sur notre esprit? ... Est-ce qu'avec cette épine blanche et épine rose s'associa le souvenir de ce fromage à la crème blanc qui un jour qu'il y avait écrasé des fraises devint rose, du rose à peu près de l'épine rose, et resta pour lui la chose délicieuse qu'il jouissait le plus à manger et qu'il réclamait tous les jours de la cuisinière? Peut-être cette ressemblance l'aida-t-elle à remarquer l'épine rose et à l'aimer et en conserva-t-elle le goût dans un impérissable souvenir de gourmandise, de jours chauds, et de bonne santé. Est-ce d'un jour où il était malade, et où sa mère entra en disant : "C'est le jardinier qui a coupé ces branches d'épines roses" et les lui posa sur son lit, et seul devant cette branche qui souriait par toutes ses fleurs et répandait dans sa chambre l'odeur des chemins où il aurait aimé courir, fut-elle distinguée comme pour elle-même et aimée ce jour-là où elle était chargée pour lui

(140) Jean Santeuil, Vol. III, p. 297.

(141) Jean Santeuil, Vol. I, p. 137.

de la gloire et de la beauté de tout le reste, qu'elle semblait lui apporter dans l'odeur de ses branches et la rougeur de ses fleurs roses? Mais elle resta pour lui non pas même la fleur préférée, il n'aurait pas pensé à le dire, mais moins une fleur que la douceur même du printemps, des printemps passés, des chemins d'Etrevilles. (142)

Actually, Proust is beginning to formulate his philosophy dealing with moments which capture the present and the past through the agency of some sensation common to both times; this philosophy he expresses in various flower images. We have already quoted Jean's definition of poetry as "la fleur délicate des moments perdus " (143). Later, Jean prizes a reality which is based on "ces brusques retours de la mémoire désintéressée, (qui) nous fait flotter entre le présent et le passé dans leur essence commune, qui dans le présent nous a rappelé le passé, essence qui nous trouble en ce qu'elle est nous-même, ce nous-même que nous ne sentons pas au moment, mais que nous retrouvons comme un miel délicieux resté après les choses quand elles sont loin de nous " (144). This passage, with its invocation of a disinterested memory, its emphasis on the present as well as the past must surely help to convince us that Jean Santeuil as well as A la Recherche du Temps Perdu is not based on nostalgia.

In any case, Jean has already decided that his poetry shall deal with Time. It shall also demand a truthfulness not necessary in life. "Cette exaltation qui nous fait proférer de belles paroles dans un but et pour quelque fin intéressée est le contraire de la littérature qui s'efforce

(142) Ibid, pp. 203-4. The underlining is my own.

(143) Ibid, pp. 84-5.

(144) Jean Santeuil, Vol. 11, p. 339. The underlining is my own.

d'exprimer avec sincérité ce que l'on sent. D'où sans doute l'antagonisme qu'il y a entre l'art et la vie " (145). In fact, this sentiment, along with the use of the terms "désintéressé" and "sincérité" show us that Proust and Gide, who used these terms in the creation of his own philosophy, had more in common in their search for truth than Gide's criticism suggests. Soon, in fact, poetry becomes the centre of Jean's moral life, conquering his laziness. "Peu à peu le don de poésie qui était en lui, lui était devenu le centre de sa vie morale." (146). Thus, Jean Santeuil, like A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, ends at the point where the artist hero decides to dedicate himself to art. We leave Jean happy to cultivate his own garden of poetry.

If we still had any doubts that Proust has, with Jean Santeuil, passed beyond allegory in flower imagery, an article that he wrote on the works of Senancour at the time of writing A l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs settles the question :

Mais je n'essaye pas de donner un sens moral aux phénomènes naturels. Car c'est de la pure allégorie. Cependant il est certain que la vue de la nature réveille la pensée et que la vie de la pensée peut trouver mille charmes à la vie de la nature. Ce qui prouve une relation mystérieuse (puisque progrès dans la vie de l'esprit et dans l'admiration de la nature sont parallèles et réagissent) entre la vérité intellectuelle et la beauté naturelle. (147)

Here, again, Proust emphasizes the necessary bond between truth and beauty. And, as far as 'morality' goes, Proust identifies with the

(145) Jean Santeuil, Vol. III, pp. 143-4.

(146) Ibid, p. 304.

(147) Proust, Marcel : Senancour, c'est moi, Essais et Articles, Editions Gallimard, 1971, p. 568-9.

"Rêverie morale inspirée par la nature" (148), in Senancour's works.

Again, Proust is not interested in anything as doctrinaire as a moral treatise or judgement, but rather in a contemplation of human beings against a background of living things in nature distinct from man, and thus a foil and a contrast for him, and yet not so distinct that he cannot feel great sympathy for its natural patterns and its similarities, the best source, it follows, of metaphor.

We have now traced the development of flower imagery and the human landscape from the very early Allégorie through Proust's Romantic Rêveries to Jean Santeuil, a comparatively mature work. However, a few examples from the 'landscape' and imagery of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu soon show us the greater sophistication of Proust's last work, a novel which, with the knowledge of Proust's earlier works, becomes itself an obvious tribute to the process of maturing in the artist. As far as symbolism and landscapes in general go, the symbol of the garden shows us Proust's movement away from a wholly personal mythology towards a personal mythology deepened by traditional symbolism (and vice-versa). In detail, too, the human landscape of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu is less egocentric than that of Jean Santeuil, which revolves around its hero. Marcel is surrounded by many fascinating 'human flowers', and, as we see by the example of Charlus, humour has become a major element in the flower imagery associated with various characters. (Some of our examples here we will expand in the chapters

(148) Op. cit.

dealing with particular flowers, noticeably the Rose and Forget-me-not chapters). The storm imagery, too, is more mature, as is the colour symbolism associated with the flowers. And the theme of the artificiality of Society in contrast to the creativity and simplicity of Nature is much more marked in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. In fact, in each separate chapter, we will study, in conjunction with each flower symbol, the characters, storm and colour symbolism and treatment of the theme of society versus nature (not necessarily in that order).

The symbol of the garden, then, is far less egocentric and negative in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. In Jean Santeuil, it illustrated the theme of acceptance, or, much more often, rejection. In A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, it illustrates the theme of knowledge traditionally associated with the garden in the Bible and in earlier mythologies. This theme is a much more universal and interesting one, as it begs the question as to the use and nature of knowledge. Proust, however, emphasizes the importance of the knowledge (often sexual) to be found in each separate garden for Marcel, rather than the rejection or welcome, the approval or disapproval, he might also find there. Knowledge and experience are invaluable to the artist; thus artists like Bergotte, with his affairs, seem almost moral. Marcel, too, seeks many different types of knowledge, symbolized in various gardens. At one point, Marcel tries to get back to "le jardin où nous avons été enfant" (C. G., p. 91) by revisiting "tel jardin où nous avons vécu jeunes". He adds "Ce sont là pèlerinages fort hasardeux et à la suite desquels on compte autant de déceptions que de succès". He goes on to say "Il n'y a pas besoin de voyager pour le revoir, (le jardin où nous avons été enfant)

il faut descendre pour le retrouver". That is, one must descend within oneself, to that layer of one's mind which keeps the past as fresh as the present; although a sensory detail may act as a catalyst in this quest, any 'trip' to the past must be a non-materialistic, subjective one. Even dreams, the most subjective of phenomena, provide him with insight on the past, sometimes very apt, especially in their seeming muddles, but accepted with curiously little analysis by the narrator. The naive Marcel loves and at the same time dreads sleep for the oblivion it brings, the blotting out of problems, but at the same time the loss of the self, as in a smaller imitation of death. The older Marcel accepts dreams as a very important part of life, which often seems so subjective as to be a dream itself. Sleep is to Marcel another garden with all the aforementioned resources and dangers. The trip into sleep is difficult for Marcel, but not far from its threshold he finds his garden. "Non loin de là est le jardin réservé où croissent comme des fleurs inconnues les sommeils si différents les uns des autres, sommeil du datura, du chanvre indien, des multiples extraits d'éther, sommeil de la belladone, de l'opium, de la valériane, fleurs qui restent closes jusqu'au jour où l'inconnu prédestiné viendra les toucher" (C. G., p. 86). Marcel's dreams have a certain landscape, a series of levels which continue the image of digging deep into one's mind. Close to the surface, after the garden, is a convent, where one still hears the lessons learned in the waking world being repeated. Proust was a very astute observer of the phenomenon of sleep, and the landscape of sleep, with its wave-like descent from shallow to deeper levels he describes

with the same accuracy we can see in his natural landscapes. The dream convent and its lessons bring him closer to awakening again, but he soon moves on, beyond the dream garden to a deeper level :

Aux parois obscures de cette chambre qui s'ouvre sur les rêves, et où travaille sans cesse cet oubli des chagrins amoureux duquel est parfois interrompue et défaite par un cauchemar plein de réminiscences la tâche vite recommencée, pendent, même après qu'on est réveillé, les souvenirs des songes, mais si enténébrés que souvent nous ne les apercevons pour la première fois qu'en pleine après-midi quand le rayon d'une idée similaire vient fortuitement les frapper; quelques-uns déjà, harmonieusement clairs pendant qu'on dormait, mais devenus si méconnaissables que, ne les ayant pas reconnus, nous ne pouvons que nous hâter de les rendre à la terre, ainsi que des morts trop vite décomposés.
(C. G., p. 87).

But Marcel does not bury all his dreams back into his dream garden or cemetery, as we see in following his trip even further into himself :

Près de la grille est la carrière où les sommeils profonds viennent chercher les substances qui imprègnent la tête d'enduits si durs que, pour éveiller le dormeur, sa propre volonté est obligée, même dans un matin d'or, de frapper à grands coups de hache, comme un jeune Siegfried. Au delà encore sont les cauchemars ... avec leurs albums fantaisistes, où nos parents qui sont morts viennent de subir un grave accident qui n'exclut pas une guérison prochaine. En l'attendant nous les tenons dans une petite cage à rats, où ils sont plus petits que des souris blanches et, couverts de gros boutons rouges, plantés chacun d'une plume, nous tiennent des discours cicéroniens. A côté de cet album est le disque tournant du réveil grâce auquel nous subissons un instant l'ennui d'avoir à rentrer tout à l'heure dans une maison qui est détruite depuis cinquante ans, et dont l'image est effacée, au fur et à mesure que le sommeil s'éloigne, par plusieurs autres, avant que nous arrivions à celle qui ne se présente qu'une fois le disque arrêté et qui coïncide avec celle que nous verrons avec nos yeux ouverts.
(C. G., p. 87, 88).

As we can see, Marcel's dreams do give an insight into his past, though he does not seem to be aware of the self-knowledge they offer. The dream of his parents seems a bizarre revenge for his childhood. As we have seen in Jean Santeuil, Jean, (and Marcel is a later version of Jean) resented the way in which his parents 'imprisoned' him, limited his

social life and tried to prevent him from becoming a writer. Marcel, too, associates his life-long illness with his mother and the incident of the good-night kiss. Now it is his parents who must find out what it is like to be restricted and to be ill, as he holds them helpless, pinned down by his pen, and forced to communicate with him on his level, Ciceronian dialogue rather than their former, bullying parent to child level. The dream trip, Proust seems to hint with his mention of Siegfried, is the modern version of the epic adventure. However, Marcel does sometimes use "ce bienfaisant accès d'aliénation mentale qu'est le sommeil" (C. G., p. 88), especially the sleep of oblivion, as an escape from reality, until he realizes that it, too, is actually an important part of reality. "Le rêve était encore un de ces faits de ma vie, qui m'avait toujours le plus frappé, qui avait dû le plus servir à me convaincre du caractère purement mental de la réalité" (T. R., p. 914).

Various gardens in experience are, however, every bit as important to Marcel. There is the small garden at the Combray house, where Swann's company detains Marcel's mother in the incident of the good-night kiss. More important is Swann's own park. It is forbidden territory to Marcel, for Swann has made an 'unfortunate' marriage with a former courtesan, Odette. Through the park fence, Marcel catches one of his first glimpses of Odette, whose past includes incidents which suggest that she was attracted to women as well as to men; Charlus, a homosexual; and Gilberte, Marcel's first love, also rather sexually ambiguous. Thus, Marcel is introduced in one moment to characters who represent the whole spectrum of sexual experiences in Proust's human landscapes. Next comes Odette's

Winter Garden, Marcel's first real experience with society, where he can observe more closely Swann, an artist manqué, now trapped at the end of his cycle in the infertility that love, habit, and socializing cause. Odette (now Mme Swann) is again a central figure in the Bois de Boulogne, which she treats as her own garden (J. F., p. 638) and which strikes Marcel as, in mythological terms, "le jardin des Femmes" (J. F., p. 417). Later, at Balbec, Marcel finds the garden which is to bring him the most suffering of all - the garden of 'les jeunes filles en fleurs' (J. F., p. 906), one of whom is Albertine. The country and town gardens of the duchess of Guermantes also have an important role to play in Marcel's search for knowledge; the red and violet flowers of the former and the human orchid of the latter all form part of the young artist's sentimental education. Marcel will finally reach the most important garden of all, the private garden which is the creative mind of any true artist - "ce jardin intérieur où nous sommes forcés de rester toujours" (S. G., p. 943). Elstir, for example, before he paints any flowers, transplants them into this garden of his mind.

Already we notice that one main difference between Marcel and earlier Proustian heroes is that he is surrounded by a wealth of characters who actually do more to help him in his artistic apprenticeship than nature did for the earlier more self-indulgent heroes. All these characters form part of Proust's human landscapes, and are more often associated with flowers, whether these flowers constitute part of metaphors, or become symbols, leitmotifs, or just evocative images. Thus, Odette reveals a great deal about her character when she invests the flowers

she has chosen to surround her because of their sensual and artificial appearance with a certain atmosphere of indecency. On the other hand, when she strolls through the Bois de Boulogne, far from imposing human characteristics on the surrounding vegetation, Odette becomes another flower in the 'Garden of Women'. In some ways she is closer to nature than is Swann; yet nature has an inspirational effect on Swann, while Odette curbs his creativity. In another example of a seeming bond between nature and human behaviour, Marcel finds in the regular movement of the water-lilies from bank to bank of the Vivonne a perfect metaphor of the obsessive routine in his Aunt Léonie's life. Sometimes it is not easy to pinpoint the exact quality which a flower and a character share; the full-blown moss rose, for example evokes the general impression of the bulky, limp M. de Charlus (J. F., p. 752). In Jean Santeuil, the image of the moss rose occurs in a sycophantic comment on M. de Montesquiou :

Bien plus tard, il (Jean) fit peu à peu connaissance avec certaines fleurs. Et ce fut toujours un artiste qui, par le prestige d'une parole autorisée et révélatrice, l'initia à sa beauté ... Souvent ayant vu à la boutonnière de M. de Montesquiou une fleur et l'ayant remarquée, ce connaisseur consommé des beautés artistiques de la nature d'un mot l'enflamma d'un amour pour la rose mousseuse. (149)

Montesquiou, by the way, furiously charged Proust with caricaturing him in M. de Charlus, but Proust seemed genuinely dismayed that anyone would consider his novel as a roman à clef and not just as the product of an impersonal use of all past experiences. In M. de Charlus in particular, we become aware of a wide spectrum of emotional tones behind the images that Proust uses. On the serious side, as we have seen, Proust tries to convince the reader of the possible beauty of M. de Charlus's relationship with Jupien through orchid/bee imagery. With more success, he

(149) Jean Santeuil, Vol. 1, p. 205.

uses M. de Charlus on occasion as a foil, a character to whom he can attach his most serious imagery with such irony that it often seems that he is poking fun, not so much at Charlus, but at his own images. This self-mockery is something of which the Proust of Jean Santeuil was not really capable. For example, the rose imagery, with all its associations with the Romance of the Rose, is very sombre. However, in terms of Charlus and his friends, it becomes very limp, not to say wilted. At one point in the novel, Charlus and Morel dine together at a table decorated with three roses which are certainly past their best. They remind Charlus of better times; for their names, borrowed from the aristocracy, ironically evoke a picture of the young and handsome Charlus, who, with two other aristocratic male friends, made such a devoted and beautiful group that they were called "les trois Grâces" (J. F., p. 750). Fate has not been kind to Charlus, who now finds himself part of a far less salubrious 'eternal triangle', consisting of himself (soon to demean himself by joining the Verdurin clan), Morel (the attraction to be found there, a musician whose father was a valet, proud of his professional name and thus impervious to all Charlus' offers of a title) and Jupien (in whom Marcel's grandmother recognizes one of 'nature's gentlemen', but who becomes, none-the-less, little more than Charlus' pimp). Three very sorry and not very aristocratic roses indeed. Later, totally misunderstanding the relationship between the staid Professor Brichot (who, being blind, needs someone to lean on) and Marcel, Charlus twits the Professor with being as fresh as a little rose (P., p. 207). No wonder Montesquiou,

if he did take the portrait of Charlus personally, was annoyed. Charlus has, moreover, a whole precious language of flowers at his command, which he trots out in an effort to seduce Marcel. Thus he is (or pretends to be) furious when Marcel refuses to understand the sentimental message of the forget-me-nots on the binding of a novel from Charlus, for these flowers, as we shall see in the chapter concerning them, have much more serious connotations for Marcel. At this point, a totally puzzled Marcel is bombarded with the 'storm' of Charlus' anger, complete with orchestration from Beethoven, another example of an ironic contrast to Proust's own serious use of such imagery. However, returning to Charlus, Morel, and the former's sense of aristocratic worth, we notice with amusement the elaborate crests and mottos Charlus devises to embellish the books he gives to Morel. "Quelquefois elles étaient brèves et confiantes, comme "Spes mea", ou comme "Exspectata non eludet"; quelquefois seulement résignées, comme "J'attendrai"; certaines galantes : "Mesmes plaisir du mestre", ou conseillant la chasteté, comme celle empruntée aux Simiane, semée de tours d'azur et de fleurs de lis et détournée de son sens : "Sustenant lilia turres" " (S. G., p. 1066). To Marcel, of course, lilies are the flowers of Venice, city of spring, rebirth, the artistic Renaissance, a symbol as serious to him as is the Easter lily in religion.

Most of all, Proust's flower symbols are very serious, and centre around Marcel, the future artist. Only the artists in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu have a truly positive relationship with nature. Thus, Elstir, perhaps, more than any other character, has an ability to enjoy and interpret nature, while

Swann and Mme Guermantes, possible artists who do not fulfil their potential, do at least love nature, and introduce Marcel to it, Swann with his park and Mme de Guermantes with her park and town garden. The difference between artists and non-artists or failed artists is made even more clear by the symbol of the storm, and, as we shall see later, related colour symbolism. We shall discuss these symbols in terms of individual flower images in the rest of this thesis, but, here, we wish to emphasize the complexity of Proust's symbolic pattern in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu compared to those in his other works. No longer is the storm a self-indulgent, Romantic, or melodramatic symbol. Vinteuil, for example, creates his greater work out of suffering, the stormy septet, far more profound than the peaceful sonata, leading to a climax of joy and rebirth. Swann, who avoids pain, never becomes a true artist. Marcel, despite his literal childhood dislike of storms, and his unwillingness to face up to his irrational fears (as in the incident of the good-night kiss) nevertheless weathers various emotional storms, the greatest arising from his love affair with Albertine. To these storms, indeed, he finally admits to owing his maturity and the strength to take up his vocation as an artist :

Mais je me rendais compte aussi que cette souffrance, que j'avais connue d'abord avec Gilberte ... est salutaire ... (car, si peu que notre vie doive durer, ce n'est que pendant que nous souffrons que nos pensées, en quelque sorte agitées de mouvements perpétuels et changeants, font monter comme dans une tempête, à un niveau d'où nous pouvons la voir, toute cette immensité réglée par des lois, sur laquelle, postés à une fenêtre mal placée, nous n'avons pas vue, car le calme du bonheur la laisse unie et à un niveau trop bas; peut-être seulement pour quelques grands génies ce mouvement existe-t-il constamment sans qu'il y ait besoin pour eux des agitations de la douleur.
(T. R., p. 897).

Colours, too, take on a complexity in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. Up until this novel, with the possible exception of Jean Santeuil, Proust has not made very much of colours. However, there is one early work which does give an indication of the meaning colours are to have in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. In La Conversation, red is the colour of experience, perhaps even of decadence. In this piece, a young man is advised by an uncle to give up his excesses; however, to the young man's aid comes his mother and an artist friend. The uncle wishes the young man to give up his colourful cravats and buttonholes and to settle down to the serious work of writing. But the best groundwork for art is experience, according to the artist : "Être beau, en jouir, plaire, être fou, vivre". Conventiality kills art :

Traduisez cela en art ou en la littérature pour voir quelle ennuyeuse grisaille cela donnera ... Certes je ne demande pas que votre fils, pour aviver de quelques rouges la gamme de couleurs que présente sa vie, pousse jusqu'à l'assassinat, mais l'équitation et une folle élégance, les dettes et les expédients, le jeu, la débauche, voilà les scènes nécessaires et charmantes de sa vie de jeune homme, voilà la plus intelligente et artistique manière dont il la puisse passer tant qu'il sera si beau et que l'on aimera. Bonne ou mauvaise, puisqu'elle est telle, dit en soupirant la mère d'Honoré, j'aime mieux croire que la vie de mon fils est belle plutôt qu'horrible. (150)

Proust, however, adds a moral at the end of this passage to the effect that such dissipations do not always help the future artist. The colour symbolism, the red for experience, the grey for a sort of dullness in life he retains and uses in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. The hawthorns, sonata and septet, as we have seen so many critics point out, certainly

(150) Proust, Marcel : La Conversation, Textes non repris en volume par Proust, pp. 174,5,6.

continue this private symbolism of colours, backed up, as we shall see, by traditional colour symbolism. In fact, colour is an important part of most of the flowers in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, as each chapter on a separate flower will show.

As we can see in La Conversation, Proust had an ambiguous attitude to time spent in Society. It provides the artist with a great deal of material for his work, but it can, like love, enslave him and bring infertility with it. Society revolves around artificial and heartless values, and, thus, the flowers one finds in Society are particularly artificial and lifeless or menacing, and they often bring out various types of snobbishness in the salon frequenters.

Finally, we will study, in the conclusion, the progression of psychological seasons through which Marcel passes, from a 'social springtime' of enthusiasm to the 'winter forest' of the last salon at the Guermantes, and; for Marcel at least, a promise of rebirth, of new spring, in his work. Thus, as we can see, Proust has almost too obvious a pattern in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. It is, however, an amazingly complex one, which leads the critic to the heart of the themes of Proust's novel, and which is thus immensely rewarding to study. In the chapters to come, then, we shall look at the importance of various individual flowers in Proust's human landscape, and will note the way in which their meaning is clarified by the juxtaposition with storm and colour imagery, and determine the way in which they help us to understand various characters in the novel, not the least of whom is Marcel, the future artist.

The first reading of Du Côté de Chez Swann tends to leave us with the impression of Combray as a peaceful, protected haven from the world's storms, a relic of that most orderly of ~~times~~, the feudal Middle Ages. (1)

Only after further study does one begin to notice some of the negative aspects of this seductively simple world of Marcel's childhood. Nowhere is the dual nature of Combray, its beauty and its indolence, its unthinking acceptance of a mechanical routine, more apparent than in the image of the water-lilies on the Vivonne. Indeed, we cannot help but feel that Proust was drawing on his knowledge of Homer's Odyssey and of the episode of the lotus eaters when he associated the water-lily, of the same family as the lotus, with the dreamlike, effortless quality of remembered days of childhood. (2) Certainly, many of the inhabitants of Combray - Aunt Léonie, Swann, and even the young Marcel - in their avoidance of suffering and their preference for the artificial, remind us of the lotus eaters.

The water-lilies belong to 'le côté de Guermantes' as opposed to 'le côté de Méséglise'. Marcel therefore associates the elegant river landscape with the medieval glory of the Guermantes. Indeed, the Vivonne played an important role in the history of Combray, for the

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- (1) Girard, René : Introduction, Proust, Twentieth Century Views, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N. J., p. 12.
- (2) Miss Carruthers warns us in Flower Lore (Belfast, 1879, p. 126) that it may be an error to equate the lotus flower with the lotus-eater episode in Homer's Odyssey, as he probably meant a plant of a similar name. However, if the association of the flower with the lotus-eaters is a mistake, it is a widespread one, and, indeed, an understandable one, as the lotus is the sacred flower of the East; in Buddhism at least it could be said to be the flower of contemplation and escape from existence into non-existence. Stuart Gilbert, in his study of Joyce's use of the lotus as a symbol, makes a detailed and very convincing plea for the flower rather than the plant being the original lotus of Homer's Odyssey (Stuart Gilbert : James Joyce's Ulysses, Vintage Books, New York, 1952, pp. 153, 4.)

counts of Combray used it as a natural defense against the attacks of the Guermantes. However, the river, a symbol of the flux of time, proves as inadequate as the stone fortress, whose crumbling remains Marcel finds in the grass along the banks of the river. The counts of Combray are defeated, but the novel emphasizes that their conquerors, the Guermantes shall suffer a similar fate.

The water-lilies, then, are an integral part of a fluid, ever-changing landscape, rich in images of historical flux. The flowers themselves, however, are primarily symbols of flux in the sense of aimlessness and lack of will power in human nature. Their repetitive, uncontrolled movement reminds Marcel of the neurotic routine of, for example, his Aunt Léonie :

Bientôt le cours de la Vivonne s'obstrue de plantes d'eau. Il y en a d'abord d'isolées comme tel nénufar à qui le courant au travers duquel il était placé d'une façon malheureuse laissait si peu de repos que, comme un bac actionné mécaniquement, il n'abordait une rive que pour retourner à celle d'où il était venu, refaisant éternellement la double traversée. Poussé vers la rive, son pédoncule se déliait, s'allongeait, filait, atteignait l'extrême limite de sa tension jusqu'au bord où le courant le reprenait, le vert cordage se repliait sur lui-même et ramenait la pauvre plante à ce qu'on peut d'autant mieux appeler son point de départ qu'elle n'y restait pas une seconde sans en repartir par une répétition de la même manœuvre. Je la retrouvais de promenade en promenade, toujours dans la même situation, faisant penser à certains neurasthéniques au nombre desquels mon grand-père comptait ma tante Léonie, qui nous offrent sans changement au cours des années le spectacle des habitudes bizarres qu'ils se croient chaque fois à la veille de secouer et qu'ils gardent toujours; pris dans l'engrenage de leurs malaises et de leurs manies, les efforts dans lesquels ils se débattent inutilement pour en sortir ne font qu'assurer le fonctionnement et faire jouer le dé clic de leur diététique étrange, inéluctable et funeste. (C. S., pp. 168-9).

Aunt Léonie, however, does not seem so solitary a phenomenon as the water-lily. Her habits differ only in degree of eccentricity from the rather obsessive routine of Combray, where "le noyau tout prêt pour un cycle légendaire" already exists in "Le retour de ce samedi asymétrique ... un de ces petits événements intérieurs, locaux, presque civiques qui, dans les vies tranquilles et les sociétés fermées, créent une sorte de lien national" (C. S., p. 110.). An outsider who does not know about this asymmetrical Saturday becomes a source of amusement to the self-centered Combray folk. Routine, then, becomes an excluding influence, keeping the outsider at a distance. Narrowing and imprisoning it may be, but the prison is a comforting one. Habit quiets the fear of the unknown, soothes and isolates from a hostile world the invalid, the overly sensitive, or, simply, the servant, peasant, or children, or citizen of Combray who would far rather defer to an established social and moral code than to think one out for himself. Thus, the narrator notes that "les bourgeois d'alors se faisaient de la société une idée un peu hindoue, et la considéraient comme composée de castes fermées" (C. S., p. 16). Meanwhile, Françoise, the servant, obeys "un code impérieux" (C. S., p. 28), which defines precisely the ideal behaviour of children. "Ces lois antiques" are scarcely less bizarre or narrowing than Aunt Léonie's routines and habits.

Marcel himself, as the reader quickly discovers, suffers from a lack of will power and uses 'Habit' so frequently as a comforter in strange, and therefore threatening surroundings, that his subsequent resemblance

to his aunt comes as no surprise. Yet, as a sensitive, dreamy child, Marcel is able to appreciate, as he will later communicate, all the poetry and beauty of the aimless drifting of the flowers on the Vivonne. He is attracted to a Romantic, easy-flowing way of life.

Que de fois j'ai vu, j'ai désiré imiter quand je serais libre de vivre à ma guise, un rameur, qui, ayant lâché l'aviron, s'était couché à plat sur le dos, la tête en bas, au fond de sa barque, et la laissant flotter à la dérive, ne pouvant voir que le ciel qui filait lentement au-dessus de lui, portait sur son visage l'avant-goût du bonheur et de la paix.
(C. S., p. 170).

Like the water-lily, the description of every minute movement of which witnesses Marcel's appreciation of it as a poetic symbol, Marcel wishes to abandon his free-will and move according to the current of the river. On the positive side, the young Marcel sees such a way of life as a Romantic union of the poet with nature, his image of the boat without a pilot owing much to Rousseau's description of himself "couché dans (son) bateau (qu'il) laissait dériver au gré de l'eau " (3). We are also reminded of 'le bateau ivre' of Rimbaud, the current which carries the poet along representing the flow of his own emotions. Into this Romantic landscape the young Marcel introduces a young woman "dont le visage pensif et les voiles élégants n'étaient pas de ce pays" (C. S., p. 170). He imagines her to be suffering from an unhappy love affair, burying herself in the countryside in a small house whose window frames her as she looks out at the limited view offered her stretching no further than "la barque amarrée près de la porte" (C. S., p. 171), a symbol, following the Romantic theme, of an emotional life now ended. However, the older Marcel, the narrator who describes the water-lily, has already realized

(3) Rousseau, Jean-Jacques : Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire, Edition critique par M. Raymond, Lille Librairie Giard, Genève Librairie Droz, 1948, p. 79. Please note in this section that the choice of metaphor for a drifting way of life moves from positive (the boats of the Romantics) to negative and unromantic -- "un bac actionné mécaniquement".

that an uncontrolled life, such as he indulged in during his affair with Albertine, is not really such an attractive thing. After all, 'un bac actionné mécaniquement' (to which the narrator likens the water-lily) is far less romantic than 'un bateau ivre' ! Even the young Marcel feels the touch of melancholy arising from an underlying lack of purpose in a life which is a perpetual fête. An aura of boredom hovers over even the creatures of nature in this landscape which Marcel sees only on sunny days.

Dans le ciel férié flânait longuement un nuage oisif. Par moments, oppressée par l'ennui, une carpe se dressait hors de l'eau dans une aspiration anxieuse.
(C. S., p. 170)

Plus loin, les fleurs plus nombreuses étaient plus pâles ... et disposées par le hasard en enroulements si gracieux qu'on croyait voir flotter à la dérive, comme après l'effeuillement mélancolique d'une fête galante, des roses mousseuses en guirlandes dénouées.
(C. S., p. 169).

At its most poetic, such a life would have the cloying surfeit and melancholy of some of Watteau's paintings, or, rather, Verlaine's poems about them.

Such sunshine, such drifting and idleness, such childlike, irresponsible happiness do not, Proust seems to say, help the poet with his vocation. It is during his walks along the Guermantes Way that Marcel experiences most of his doubts about his ability to write. As though he had taken to heart the passive example of the water-lilies (who, like the lilies of the field, neither reap nor sow), he turns to others to help him to become an author. "dès que je me le demandais, tâchant de trouver un sujet où je pusse faire tenir une signification philosophique infinie," says Marcel, "mon esprit s'arrêtait de fonctionner, je ne voyais plus

que le vide en face de mon attention, je sentais que je n'avais pas de génie ou peut-être une maladie cérébrale l'empêchait de naître" (C. S., p. 172,3). (Remember that Aunt Léonie uses the same excuse of illness to justify her behaviour.) So Marcel dreams that the Duchess of Guermantes, in his words, "me faisait lui dire le sujet des poèmes que j'avais l'intention de composer" (C. S., p. 172.). When this dream proves unsatisfactory, Marcel turns to his father "Parfois je comptais sur mon père pour arranger cela. Il était si puissant" (C. S., p. 173). All of his troubles will end because :

peut-être cette absence de génie, ce trou noir qui se creusait dans mon esprit quand je cherchais le sujet de mes écrits futurs, n'était-il aussi qu'une illusion sans consistance, et cesserait-elle par l'intervention de mon père qui avait dû convenir avec le Gouvernement et avec la Providence que je serais le premier écrivain de l'époque" (C. S., p. 173).

Marcel must learn that he cannot remain like the water-lilies whose pliable stalks make them bend and move under the influence of outside forces, but that he must instead support his work on a foundation as solid as the Combray church tower, on a perspective which enables him to surmount the opinions of others as well as the changes of time.

But the narrator condemns the repetitive and aimless motion of the water-lilies most effectively by his allusions to Dante's spiritual epic.

Tel était ce nénufar, pareil aussi à quelqu'un de ces malheureux dont le tourment singulier, qui se répète indéfiniment durant l'éternité, excitait la curiosité de Danté, et dont il se serait fait raconter plus longuement les particularités et la cause par le supplicié lui-même, si Virgile, s'éloignant à grands pas, ne l'avait forcé à le rattraper au plus vite, comme moi mes parents (C. S., p. 169).

If Marcel venerates his parents almost as much as Dante venerated Virgil, he also awards the source of the Vivonne all the awe the ancients accorded the gates of Hell (C. S., p. 171). Certainly, Marcel, on his walks along the Guermantes Way does seem to abandon all hope as far as his creative ambitions are concerned. But, of course, as he grows older, he learns that the Combray 'epic' is hardly on the scale of Dante's. His parents are not infallible and even the Vivonne has a disappointment in store for him. "Un de mes autres étonnements fut de voir les "sources de la Vivonne", que je me représentais comme quelque chose d'aussi extra-terrestre que l'Entrée des Enfers, et qui n'étaient qu'une espèce de lavoir carré où montaient des bulles" (T. R., p. 693).

The Guermantes Way, being a long walk, can only be undertaken in fine weather, so that it is no wonder that Marcel associates its countryside with sunshine, happiness, and the leisure of long summer afternoons. The Méséglise Way, on the other hand, is, more often than not, a stormy walk. This storminess, like the holiday aura which clings to the Guermantes Way, can also be seen as the phenomenon of a psychological landscape. During his walks by the Guermantes Way, Marcel does what he can to avoid the suffering caused by the thought of his failure as a writer, and to spare himself the fatigue of trying to discover the essence behind certain objects which he notices during his outing. By the Méséglise Way, however, he is introduced to various characters who have suffered much because of the emotional storms in their lives. The musician Vinteuil, for example, perhaps the most inspirational artist

in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, is able to compose a work of the depth and strength of his Septet because of the anguish his lesbian daughter has caused him. Indeed, the Septet reminds Marcel of "un matin d'orage" (P., p. 250), and the colour it evokes is the red of passion and martyrdom. Also along the Méséglise Way is Swann's park where Marcel glimpses the unfaithful Mme Swann, the homosexual Charlus and his own painful first love, Gilberte. Thus, Marcel is offered the classic choice of two ways - one easy and sunny, the other difficult and stormy. Combray itself offers the best example of the symbolic crossroads which so fascinated Proust (C. G., p. 296; S. G., p. 624, T. R., p. 1029.).

However, the ways are not so opposite as they may seem. Marcel's childhood Combray is necessarily simple, as he has not yet the experience to see the way in which one road may lead to another - as Gilberte shows him in a much later visit to Combray - nor to see the way in which one symbolic shade of colour may be associated closely with a quite opposite shade. The water-lily, even in Combray, can sometimes hide in the centre of its white petals a scarlet heart. And even the Guermantes Way can suffer the occasional storm. Marcel's description of a walk by the Vivonne after a midday storm proves as much.

Comme les rives étaient à cet endroit très boisées, les grandes ombres des arbres donnaient à l'eau un fond qui était habituellement d'un vert sombre mais que parfois, quand nous rentrions par certains soirs rassérénés d'après-midi orageux, j'ai vu d'un bleu clair et cru, tirant sur le violet, d'apparence cloisonnée et de goût japonais. Ça et là, à la surface, rougissait comme une fraise une fleur de nymphéa au coeur écarlate, blanc sur les bords.
(C. S., p. 169).

Thus, the storm seems to bring out the passionate colours of the river landscape. In any case, the lily with a scarlet heart fascinates Marcel; he believes he sees its human equivalent in Mlle de Stermaria, who, whilst remaining pale, cool and aloof, hides within her a heart capable of a great deal of passion. This mixture of purity and passion is to remain forever a great attraction for Marcel.

Mais à certains regards qui passaient un instant sur le fond si vite à sec de sa prunelle et dans lesquels on sentait cette douceur presque humble que le goût prédominant des plaisirs des sens donne à la plus fière, laquelle bientôt ne reconnaît plus qu'un prestige, celui qu'a pour elle tout être qui peut les lui faire éprouver fût-ce un comédien ... pour lequel elle quittera peut-être un jour son mari; à certaine teinte d'un rose sensuel et vif qui s'épanouissait dans ses joues pâles, pareille à celle qui mettait son incarnat au coeur des nymphéas blancs de la Vivonne, je croyais sentir qu'elle eût facilement permis que je vinsse chercher sur elle le goût de cette vie si poétique qu'elle menait en Bretagne.
(J. F., pp. 688-689).

This poetic life Marcel fills with images of "son (Mlle de Stermaria's) château romanesque" and "les fleurs roses des bruyères" which would better suit a medieval princess in a fairy tale than Mlle de Stermaria of the inviting eyes. Perhaps, too, Marcel feels that, like the water-lilies or a boat, Mlle de Stermaria is just waiting for a current to carry her away, for someone to awaken her passions. Marcel also delights in thinking of Mlle de Stermaria as a nun (C. G., p. 386). Ignored by this woman, who chooses another lover, Marcel begins to learn about suffering and about the deceptive aura of innocence which he often imagines or exaggerates around the girls he loves. He must face reality and accept that complete purity or innocence rarely, if ever, exist. Even the water-lilies of the Vivonne have some message of experience to give him. Yet Marcel will need more than the sunny Guermantes Way can offer him to gain a depth of vision such as that which Vinteuil expressed

in his Septet. The subject for which he searches so unhappily along the Guermantes Way he will find on the Méséglise Way - in "une tempête furieuse" (J. F., p. 585) of love.

The water-lily, then, represents a passive, undisturbed way of life. Except for the slight tinge of red in association with Mlle de Stermaria, its whiteness suggests a purity which is also a blankness - a lack of colour. Since colour, especially red, represents experience in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, this flower is associated with those who shun experience (Marcel's Aunt Léonie) and those who are yet unawakened (Mlle de Stermaria). Marcel, as a future artist, cannot afford to escape into the comfortable world of habit and must, indeed, seek out experience. It is no wonder, then, that (as we shall see) the hawthorns which easily become symbols of the quest soon capture his allegiance.

The other flower which, like the water-lily, evokes the symbolically
under a routine of Marcel's childhood, is the white lily-flower,
or lily. Both symbols manage to convey at the same time, the peace
and security, as well as the restriction and loneliness which habit and
routine. The lily, with its 'pale' and 'pale' petals, is a symbol of
half-grown flower, perhaps more so than the lovely water-
lily, the half-life of the lily (especially of the
lily), for which Marcel never had a religion. Now is this propriety
unique to Combray, for we have first mentioned the lily-flower
their love or social rituals around a symbol of sharing of tea. At its
most basic, the lily is a symbol of hypocrisy, self-indulgence
and superstition - as is Marcel's own. However, at the most

The Lime Blossom Tea and Associated Symbolism :

Froust's Concept of Communion

and a true communion. Marcel's concept of the lily is,
literally, a better symbol than that of the water-lily. The latter
flights on the surface of the water, the former reveals a sort of life
and water in which it is just as much a part of the water as of the
lily. Marcel's concept of the lily is, in fact, a symbol of a
sort of communion. In Marcel's mind, the lily is a symbol of all the
of Combray. This 'communion', however, does not occur by sight.
Marcel has to make a great effort of will to reach the lily. The lily
of life and to remember the communion he felt when he first tasted the
lily as a child. Thus, the lily is a symbol of the experience
of the rituals of childhood, of love and of society. The communion of a

The other flower which, like the water-lily, evokes the compulsively ordered routine of Marcel's childhood Combray is the dried lime-flower, or tilleul. Both symbols manage to convey at the same time, the peace and security, as well as the restriction and boredom which habit can create. The tilleul, with its 'diminished' beauty of dried flowers or half-quenched flames, perhaps conveys even better than the lovely water-lily, the half-life of the Combray inhabitants (especially of Aunt Léonie), for whom order becomes almost a religion. Nor is this propensity unique to Combray, for we later find courtesans and hostesses building their love or social rituals around a symbolic sharing of tea. At its most comic, the ritual is a mixture of hypochondria, self-indulgence and superstition - as in Aunt Léonie's case. However, at its most serious, involving the artist for whom religion is a rich source of symbols, taking a cup of tea can lead to a resurrection of time past and a true self-communion. Here we become aware that the tilleul is, literally, a deeper symbol than that of the water-lily. The latter floats on the surface of the water, the former regains a sort of life when water is added to it; just as those indistinct morsels of paper of Japanese manufacture expand into flowers in water, so the perfume of a cup of tea expands, in Marcel's mind, into a memory of all the gardens of Combray. This 'resurrection', however, does not occur by magic; Marcel has to make a great effort of will to seek far below the surface of his mind to remember the sensations he felt when he first tasted the tilleul as a child. Thus, the maturity he has gained from the experience of the rituals of childhood, of love and of Society, the awareness of a

lack in all of them, help to give him the resolution to pin down the elusive memories evoked by the tea and to pursue a goal which he finally sees as worthwhile. The tilleul, unlike many of Proust's flowers, remains an important symbol throughout the novel because of its association with the narrator's moments out of time. Thus, although the main tilleul passage occurs at the beginning of Du Côté de Chez Swann, the theme of the rituals associated with tea occurs throughout the novel, and Marcel lays great emphasis on the tea-drinking episode in the final reunion at the Guermantes. By then, the tilleul, like Marcel has gained a consequence far beyond its original humble origins.

In Combray, Aunt Léonie prizes this drink made from an infusion of dried flowers and leaves of the lime-tree for its supposed calming properties. She indulges herself in a cup of tea whenever she manages to feel "agitée" (C. S., p. 51) despite (or perhaps because of) "l'inertie absolue où elle vivait" (C. S., p. 50). Of course, the real soothing effect of the tilleul comes, not so much from its inherent medicinal virtues, as from the order and ritual with which Aunt Léonie associates it. With an ingenuous and rather amusing faith, the old lady habitually confuses medicines and holy articles on her bedside table :

D'un côté de son lit était une grande commode jaune en bois de citronnier et une table qui tenait à la fois de l'officine et du maître-autel, où, au-dessous d'une statuette de la Vierge et d'une bouteille de Vichy-Célestins, on trouvait des livres de messe et des ordonnances de médicaments, tout ce qu'il fallait pour suivre de son lit les offices et son régime, pour ne pas manquer l'heure ni de la pepsine, ni des vêpres (C. S., p. 52).

With ritual precision, just before mass every Sunday, she gives Marcel a portion of madeleine (a cake in the shape of a pilgrim's scallop-shell) dipped in tea. Thus, since Aunt Léonie is one to perpetuate habits, Marcel grows to associate the tea and madeleine with Sunday mass, and, perhaps, communion - a fruitful association of ideas, rich in potential symbols for the mature author, as we shall see. Something which is, to others watching Aunt Léonie, just another amusing habit in "son petit train-train" (C. S., p. 109), comes to have its serious side for Marcel, who, even as a youngster, can no doubt appreciate the symbolism of the pilgrim shell, emblem of the pious journey, better than most. At the moment, this symbol of the quest or pilgrimage, introduced into the young Marcel's life as it is by the semi-comic character of his aunt, lacks the very deep significance that it will have for the narrator as he nears the end of his artistic apprenticeship. We will explore the quest symbolism, then, in the famous tea passage describing one of the most important moments out of time for the mature Marcel.

Combray, a quiet country village which abhors the unusual, not only understands a need for routine, but honours and encourages it. The workmen, for example, always make sure that their hammering will not disturb Aunt Léonie's regular afternoon nap. Yet, paradoxically, carried to extremes, compulsive behaviour such as that shown by Marcel's aunt brings with it only an uneasy peace, "une paix qui n'apporte qu'un surcroît d'anxiété" (C. S., p. 49), since it gives no opportunity for the release of surplus energy and depends on strict adherence to a rigid schedule. However, in her own way, Aunt Léonie serves as an

example of qualities which can be useful in the right circumstances, but vaguely ridiculous in the wrong ones. Thus the spectacle of the self-abnegation, seclusion, even martyrdom of his aunt is nearly always spoiled by an incongruous observation on the part of the young Marcel, who soon sees through many of her poses; for example, on Sunday morning when she allows him some of her tea, that she has not yet put on her false hairpiece - which is the main reason why she looks martyred, as the bones showing through her skin resemble a crown of thorns. He comes, moreover, to recognize the falsity of his own attitude towards the imprisoned Albertine when he sees the resemblance in himself to his old aunt; yet the poet who becomes a recluse in order to create a work of art, who conceives of the latter as his martyrdom, and who can make an almost religious symbol of a cup of tea, also owes much to the example of Aunt Léonie.

There is a certain gentleness in the fun which Proust pokes at Aunt Léonie's way of life - as he puts it, "un état incertain de chagrin, de débilité physique, de maladie, d'idée fixe et de dévotion" (C. S., p. 49). For Aunt Léonie alone of all those characters in the book who refuse to participate in life, to suffer and to create, Proust seems to have some sympathy, perhaps because she, in her seclusion and (at least pretended) self-denial, is in some way a precursor of Marcel the poet, perhaps because the quiet routine of her vegetative life is not entirely out of phase with the cycles of nature, but, most possibly, because her type of safe, religious, ordered life is that which comforted and protected Marcel's childhood in Combray (or might have if he had

not so often seen through it). In any case, Proust's sympathy is quite evident in his beautiful description of the lime-flowers with which Aunt Léonie has such an affinity, and which, dried and plucked before their time, seem such a good image of her chosen retirement from the world :

Le desséchement des tiges les avait incurvées en un capricieux treillage dans les entrelacs duquel s'ouvraient les fleurs pâles ... c'était bien des tiges de vrais tilleuls, comme ceux que je voyais avenue de la Gare, modifiées, justement parce que c'étaient non des doubles, mais elles-mêmes et qu'elles avaient vieilli. Et chaque caractère nouveau n'y étant que la métamorphose d'un caractère ancien, dans de petites boules grises je reconnaissais les boutons verts qui ne sont pas venus à terme; mais surtout l'éclat rose, lunaire et doux qui faisait se détacher les fleurs dans la forêt fragile des tiges ... signe ... de la différence entre les parties de l'arbre qui avaient été "en couleur" et celles qui ne l'avaient pas été - me montrait que ces pétales étaient bien ceux qui avant de fleurir le sac de pharmacie avaient embaumé les soirs de printemps. Cette flamme rose de cierge, c'était leur couleur encore, mais à demi éteinte et assoupie dans cette vie diminuée qu'était la leur maintenant et qui est comme le crépuscule des fleurs. Bientôt ma tante pouvait tremper dans l'infusion bouillante dont elle savourait le goût de feuille morte ou de fleur fanée une petite madeleine dont elle me tendait un morceau quand il était suffisamment amolli (C. S., p. 51-2).

No wonder Aunt Léonie relishes the taste of these dead leaves and wilted flowers, for their 'diminished' life reflects her own, shut away from the world first in her house, then in her bedroom, and finally in her bed, under "(un) couvre-lit à fleurs" (C. S., p. 50) - dried flowers of course - as though she were already under the earth. Proust makes no direct comparison between Aunt Léonie and the dried lime-flowers, but the parallels are obvious, and, besides, Proust often likens characters who have led 'dry' or sterile lives to dried flowers or fruit. Princess Sherbatoff is like a wrinkled hedge berry (T. R., p. 879); Ski, "comme des célibataires de l'Art" (T. R., p. 892) has not changed

any more than "une fleur ou un fruit qui a séché" (T. R., p. 936). Of such people, on whom life has left no impression, the narrator says, " ... la vieillesse ne les avait pas mûris ... Ils n'étaient pas des vieillards, mais des jeunes gens de dix-huit ans ~~extrêmement~~ fanés" (T. R., p. 936). And so, in exchange for giving up any real involvement in life, these old folks preserve a perpetual, but false youth.

Only in the example of Aunt Léonie, who, as we have seen, attracted Proust's sympathy, is the metaphor of the dried flower expanded so as to put a positive connotation on such images as pale colours and twilights. These details of colour and light Proust will repeat many times. As we shall see in the section on the hawthorns, Proust associates white flowers with inexperienced people, such as Mlle. de Vinteuil, and red flowers with those who have suffered and created, such as her father. Here, too, we find that "les fleurs pâles" (C. S., p. 51) have been plucked and dried in the spring before they have reached maturity; and that that part of the tree which had reached maturity and full bloom is the part which would be termed "en couleur" (C. S., p. 51). Instead of blossoms in their deepest colour of "cette flamme rose de cierge", the tilleul consists of flowers whose colour is "à demi éteinte et assoupie"; "dans de petites boules grises" Marcel recognizes "les boutons verts qui ne sont pas venus à terme" (C. S., p. 51). Grey, as we shall see especially in the rose chapter, is the colour Proust associates with a trapped unhappy life. This is not the last time that Proust will associate twilight, that indeterminate state between night and day (or day and night) with an incomplete and faded way of life.

However, the twilight way of life which Aunt Léonie chooses does not seem so unwholesome in Combray within the protective family circle as it does, for example in the divided household in impersonal Paris where Marcel imprisons Albertine and, in consequence himself. Here, the link between twilight and coming night, or death, is very evident. Marcel, too, spends much of his time in bed, wielding a hypochondriac's tyranny over Albertine, savouring an atmosphere of impending death, and thinking about, as he puts it, "le soir prématuré de ma vie" (P., p. 112). Albertine herself continues this imagery in the farewell letter which she writes Marcel, "Je suis très touchée que vous ayez gardé un bon souvenir de notre dernière promenade. Croyez que de mon côté je n'oublierai pas cette promenade deux fois crépusculaire (puisque la nuit venait et que nous allions nous quitter) et qu'elle ne s'effacera de mon esprit qu'avec la nuit complète" (F., p. 468). Albertine's choice of metaphor, like Marcel's sense of doom, is prophetic, for she dies not long after terminating her affair with Marcel. Thus, the 'premature night' of Marcel's life ends, and the twilight he can look forward to is the one before dawn, specifically the dawn evoked by Vinteuil's Septet.

Combray, then, and its tilleul, presages often a harsher future for Marcel. Even his 'quest', his difficult voyage towards his vocation has a comic counterpart in Combray. Just as Aunt Léonie introduced the concepts of communion and martyrdom (the former will be especially important to the mature Marcel) in association with the lime-blossom tea, Marcel's father takes him on walks which remind him of Christ's

walk to Calvary. "mon père, par amour de la gloire, nous faisait faire par le calvaire une longue promenade, que le peu d'aptitude de ma mère à s'orienter et à se reconnaître dans son chemin, lui faisait considérer comme la prouesse d'un génie stratégique" (C. S., p. 114). It is not clear here whether Proust is using the symbol of the calvary literally or figuratively. He may mean that the walk is a martyrdom imposed by his father, or he may mean that they choose a route actually passing a representation of calvary, such as he mentions in a metaphor describing a Combray street (C. S., p. 49). Either way, Marcel's father is scarcely following Christ's humble example. (Of course Marcel may well be jealous of the approval his father wins from his mother this way). But, on the serious side, the passage is also significant for Marcel's associating a demanding trial or effort (if not a downright martyrdom to his father's egotism) with the scent of the lime-trees. "Je tombais de sommeil, l'odeur des tilleuls qui embaumait m'apparaissait comme une récompense qu'on ne pouvait obtenir qu'au prix des plus grandes fatigues et qui n'en valait pas la peine" (C. S., p. 114,5). This, of course, is the younger, more easily discouraged Marcel. The repeated efforts which he makes to understand the sensations caused by the taste of the tea and madeleine and which form a sort of pilgrimage into the past, are, we shall see, amply rewarded.

We can see, then, that Proust's symbols, especially his religious symbols, are neither positive nor negative, serious nor comic, in themselves. Aunt Léonie's martyrdom and Marcel's father's calvary are

amusing; similar experiences in Marcel's life as he starts to take on the burden of the poet are very serious indeed, sometimes verging on the tragic, to veer again towards the comic if Marcel, like his aunt, insists too much upon them. One thing we can be sure of, and that is that the symbols which Proust borrowed from religion were most important to him. Proust obviously thought deeply about the meaning behind each symbol and behind such concepts as 'communion', which especially fascinated him. Hence we find him searching for a love that will give him the peace, the sense of sharing, the feeling of being at one with another person which his mother's kiss gave him. This kiss he describes in terms of the communion - "elle avait penché vers mon lit sa figure aimante, et me l'avait tendue comme une hostie pour une communion de paix où mes lèvres puiseraient sa présence réelle et le pouvoir de m'endormir" (C. S., p. 13) - for he finds in his mother's love rewards that others find in religion. Marcel is not alone. Many of Proust's characters express their most important desires in terms of religion, a bizarre mixture in some cases. Thus, Charlus sees young Morel, his lover, as an archangel, but he is so pompous and muddled about explaining his rather archaic brand of Christianity to Cottard's wife, that she takes him for a Jew. Artists, of course, come off best in this attempt to channel spiritual energy into non-religious directions. Their goals are more likely to yield spiritual rewards. Thus Bergotte's "angels" - his books - will prove a great deal more faithful to his memory than will Charlus's "angel" to him. Once again, then, we have evidence that

Proust thought very deeply not only about religious symbols, but also about the wish to invest life with some spiritual meaning, although very seldom with orthodox Christian beliefs and aspirations.

Proust's religion, or lack of it, has not failed to fascinate the critics, and their comments become very interesting in the context of the latter part of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu where the religious symbols, associated with love and art rather than with nature in pastoral Combray, become increasingly serious. The title of Vallée's article - La Religion Dévoyée - shows understanding of the way in which Proust's sense of the religious can appear in far from the usual context; however, it also carries a value judgement. The article says "Puisque pour lui tout est sacré, le vice et l'impudeur le sont aussi. C'est une suite naturelle ... L'impur baiser d'Albertine est sanctifié" (1). We shall see, however, that Albertine's kiss is a communion only in as much as it reminds Marcel of the 'pure' kiss of his mother; the sexual elements of it he himself is inclined to call impure, especially as physical union seems to offer him no real communion at all, in fact just the opposite, reminding him of the isolation of male and female. Claude Vallée adds "Proust a été la victime qui s'offre, l'homme-Dieu et un faux Christ" (2). Once again, a valuable poetic interpretation has been marred by a value judgement, perhaps because Vallée takes

(1) Vallée, Claude : Le Religion Dévoyée, Les Entretiens sur Marcel Proust, Mouton & Co., Paris-La Haye, 1966, p. 171.

(2) Ibid, p. 179.

Proust's 'religion' in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu more seriously than he did himself; after all some of his 'self-sacrificing' victims (Marcel at times and his aunt) can be very ridiculous. On the other hand, when he discusses Proust along with other contemporary authors, Ellmann probably underestimates the importance of religion to Proust. "Almost to a man," Ellmann says, "Edwardian writers rejected Christianity, and having done so, they felt free to 'use' it, for while they did not need religion, they did need religious metaphors" ⁽³⁾. "Proust, searching for an adjective to express his sense of basic experiences, calls them 'celestial' " Ellmann goes on to say ⁽⁴⁾. Proust does indeed describe the tilleul and madeleine as "la céleste nourriture" (T. R., p. 873), in amongst other objects which bring back the past. These objects, indeed, play a very important rôle in "la vie spirituelle" (T. R., p. 871) of Marcel. In fact, we can see that the tea/madeleine/ communion association, is more than a "useful" religious metaphor; it also expresses a youthful article of faith on the part of the young Marcel - that people can share a perfect union or communion such as he knew with his mother. However, in the light of Marcel's earlier idealistic desire to find a perfect communion with others (a desire he expresses in overt religious symbolism, as we shall see), the triumph of his final experience with "la céleste nourriture" which resurrects the poet is also a reminder of past failures and unattainable goals.

(3) Ellmann, Richard : Golden Codgers, Oxford University Press, London, New York, Toronto, 1973, p. 116.

(4) Ibid, p. 118.

Having failed to find the spiritual oneness he wanted with others in friendship, society or love, Marcel decides to stop searching outside himself, and his quest becomes an internal one; a union, if anything, of the Marcel of the past and the Marcel of the present, with tilleul and madeleine acting as the synthesizing agents for various elements in his life. The road towards this unified vision, this living metaphor, is not easy, as we shall see when we trace Marcel's progress through love and society. Thus, the shape of the madeleine and the association of the tea and madeleine with communion are particularly apt, for the former reminds Marcel of a scallop shell, symbol of a pilgrimage, whilst the latter reminds us that the best known of all quests, the quest for the grail, had as goal and reward some sort of communion, or shared ritual meal.

One of the first examples of such a meal occurs in Marcel's friendship with Saint-Loup. Marcel, visiting Saint-Loup at Doncières where he is doing his stint of national service, is delighted with the male fellowship of army life and especially with Saint-Loup's obvious enjoyment in showing him off as his artist friend. The Christmassy weather, the warmth of good food, bright fires and friends all evoke an Old Master's tableau of a religious feast. "Et dans la grande salle à manger que je traversai le premier jour, avant d'atteindre la petite pièce où m'attendait mon ami, c'était aussi à un repas de l'Evangile figuré avec la naïveté du vieux temps et l'exagération des Flandres que faisait penser le nombre des poissons, des poulardes, des coqs de bruyère ... apportés ... par des garçons" (C. G., p. 98). The general public

enjoys its feast in the large dining room, but Marcel, Saint-Loup and friends partake of a more intimate meal, curtained off on their own, so that they can discuss their own elite mysteries, the secrets of their trade.

Mais, comme pour certains tableaux où il ne suffit pas de remarquer que le personnage tient un calice, mais où il faut savoir pourquoi le peintre lui a mis dans les mains un calice, ce qu'il symbolise par là, ces opérations militaires, en dehors même de leur but immédiat, sont habituellement, dans l'esprit du général qui dirige la campagne, calquées sur des batailles plus anciennes qui sont, si tu veux, comme le passé, comme la bibliothèque, comme l'érudition, comme l'étymologie, comme l'aristocratie des batailles nouvelles.
(C. G., p. lll).

Saint-Loup is speaking here, explaining the art of war to Marcel and expressing his friendship for the latter in his use of 'tu' and his choice of metaphor, drawing the symbol of the chalice from the art with which Marcel is familiar. Of course, the chalice, mentioned at such a comradely meal amongst modern warriors is bound to remind us again of the theme of communion. However, much though Marcel enjoys the company of Saint-Loup's companions, he himself has a selfish reason for seeking Saint-Loup out - he is in love with Saint-Loup's aunt, the Duchess of Guermantes. His own selfish motivation does not stop Marcel from expecting a special devotion from Saint-Loup as a friend, and from feeling very much betrayed when he finds that Saint-Loup purposely treats him as a stranger when he was accompanied by another friend (the incident takes place not long after the meal we have been discussing).

Dans l'un de ses rôles, says Marcel, il (Saint-Loup) m'aimait profondément, il agissait à mon égard presque comme s'il était mon frère; mon frère, il l'avait été, il était redevenu, mais

pendant un instant il avait été un autre personnage qui ne me connaissait pas et qui, tenant les rênes, le monocle à l'oeil, sans un regard ni un sourire, avait levé la main à la visière de son képi pour me rendre correctement le salut militaire (C. G., p. 176).

If friendship does not guarantee a perfect sharing, neither, most certainly, does love for Marcel. In fact, the tea, of the tea and madeleine, brings back memories of Swann's love affair with Odette, a cautionary tale if there ever were one :

C'est ainsi que je restais souvent jusqu'au matin à songer au temps de Combray ... à tant de jours aussi dont l'image m'avait été plus récemment rendue par la saveur - ce qu'on aurait appelé à Combray le "parfum" - d'une tasse de thé et, par association de souvenirs, à ce que, bien des années après avoir quitté cette petite ville, j'avais appris au sujet d'un amour que Swann avait eu avant ma naissance (C. S., p. 186).

Marcel is probably so fascinated with Swann because their lives follow a very similar pattern. Certainly, they share a ritual association of tea and love, and Swann's daughter is Marcel's first love. In the love affair to which Marcel refers :

Odette fit à Swann "son" thé, lui demanda : "Citron ou crème?" et comme il répondit "crème", lui dit en riant : "Un nuage!" Et comme il le trouvait bon : "Vous voyez que je sais ce que vous aimez". Ce thé, en effet, avait paru à Swann quelque chose de précieux comme à elle-même, et l'amour a tellement besoin de se trouver une justification, une garantie de durée, dans des plaisirs qui au contraire sans lui n'en seraient pas et finissent avec lui, que quand il l'avait quittée ... ne pouvant contenir la joie que cet après-midi lui avait causée, il se répétait : "Ce serait bien agréable d'avoir ainsi une petite personne chez qui on pourrait trouver cette chose si rare, du bon thé". Une heure après, il reçut un mot d'Odette et reconnut tout de suite cette grande écriture dans laquelle une affectation de raideur britannique imposait une apparence de discipline à des caractères informes qui eussent signifié peut-être pour des yeux moins prévenus le désordre de la pensée, l'insuffisance de l'éducation, le manque de franchise et de volonté (C. S., pp. 221-222).

Once again the tea has gained a significance out of all proportion to its actual worth. Swann foolishly enjoys the ceremony which Odette creates around him, making 'his' tea to his specifications. He does not realize that the skill Odette shows in making him feel important just reflects her experience as a courtesan. Far from guaranteeing the duration of their love, the tea ceremony, her ritual of love, has been a witness of numerous love affairs. In fact, the first time that Marcel meets Odette she is his uncle's mistress and he is at the centre of her little tea parties. They serve her so well, or she is so lacking in originality, that she does not even bother to change them over the years, even the British affectations are the same :

Comme il est gentil, (says Odette of Marcel after the youngster has kissed the hand she offers him), il est déjà galant, il a un petit oeil pour les femmes; il tient de son oncle. Ce sera un parfait gentleman, ajouta-t-elle en serrant les dents pour donner à la phrase un accent légèrement britannique. Est-ce qu'il ne pourrait pas venir une fois prendre 'a cup of tea', comme disent nos voisins les Anglais? Il n'aurait qu'à m'envoyer un "bleu" le matin.
(C. S., p. 78).

Even in the choice of the type of tea each character prefers, Proust tells us something more about them. As part of her affectations, the British tea that Odette prefers reveals the same type of weaknesses as does her writing. But Odette's insistence that the ceremony she builds around her love affairs should somehow be British reminds us of a more poignant fact - one that Swann uncovers when, urged on by jealousy, he looks into her past - that her mother sold her to an Englishman when she was little more than a child (C. S., p. 367). Perhaps it is his memory she perpetuates, unconsciously, in her little

tea ceremony. In any case, Swann, eaten up by jealousy, cannot himself look back to the carefree days 'under the lime-trees' in Germany, for Odette thrived as a courtesan in the easy-going morality of such places as Baden :

Mais lui à qui jusque-là rien n'aurait pu paraître aussi fastidieux que tout ce qui se rapportait à la vie cosmopolite de Bade ou de Nice, apprenant qu'Odette avait peut-être fait autrefois la fête dans ces villes de plaisir, sans qu'il dût jamais arriver à savoir si c'était seulement pour satisfaire à des besoins d'argent que grâce à lui elle n'avait plus, ou à des caprices qui pouvaient renaître, maintenant il se penchait avec une angoisse impuissante, aveugle et vertigineuse vers l'abîme sans fond où étaient allées s'engloutir ces années du début du Septennat pendant lesquelles on passait l'hiver sur la promenade des Anglais, l'été sous les tilleuls de Bade, et il leur trouvait une profondeur douloureuse mais magnifique comme celle que leur eût prêtée un poète.
(C. S., p. 313).

Thus Swann's excursion into the past, his attempts to find out what did happen on "la promenade des Anglais" or under the lime trees to earn Odette her reputation is a far more agonizing martyrdom for him than the 'calvary' associated with the Combray lime trees is for Marcel. And, once again, Swann is almost, but not quite, a poet - or, at most, a poet in life. Marcel, like Swann, will move from worship and adoration to jealousy in his experience of the tea ritual and love. By the time that Marcel is allowed to visit the Swanns, he notices that Swann has moved away from the jealousy and uncertainty of the past into a domesticity which he first associated with the tea ritual and which formed the justification of his love, as we have seen. But the price he pays for the creature comfort of having "une petite personne chez qui on pourrait trouver cette chose si rare, du bon thé" (C. S., p. 221) is high. Swann gives no thought to the natural origin of the tea, the

taste or perfume which springs from the dried leaves or flowers evokes no memories for him. Indeed, his own life suffers from an aridity; in "la sécheresse" of his life (C. S., p. 304), Swann is unable to appreciate the spiritual quality, the essence or perfume, of Vinteuil's music. It, like the tea, becomes just another part of his love-life, "l'air national de leur amour" (C. S., p. 218).

Marcel, following in Swann's footsteps, risks a similar fate, especially as he even admires Swann's baldness - a fact recorded with humour by the narrator - "Mon père disait : "Cet enfant est idiot, il deviendra affreux." J'aurais surtout voulu être aussi chauve que Swann" (C. S., p. 414). Marcel not only shares the same progression in his love affairs with Swann, but also the main people. As we have seen, Swann's wife offers Marcel his first (and his last) invitation to tea, and in the interval her daughter takes over the honours, borrowing all of her mother's affectations, such as making 'his' tea (that is, his own special tea, for him). The outcome of these afternoon teas is less than romantic, as the rich food makes Marcel ill. After Gilberte supposedly finds another boy friend (actually the actress Léa dressed as a man), Marcel gives up his tea with her to become, instead, a frequent visitor at her mother's, where he savours the 'ephemeral, autumnal' pleasures of such a social gathering.

And, it is in Society that Marcel next looks for his perfect fellowship, embodying a mixture of chivalric and Christian ideals. He says of the

Guermantes' salon "la présence du corps de Jésus-Christ dans l'hostie ne me semblait pas un mystère plus obscur que ce premier salon du Faubourg situé sur la rive droite" (C. G., p. 30). Later, he adds:

Je ne devais plus cesser par la suite d'être continuellement invité, fût-ce avec quelques personnes seulement, à ces repas dont je m'étais autrefois figuré les convives comme les Apôtres de la Sainte-Chapelle. Ils se réunissaient là en effet, comme les premiers chrétiens, non pour partager seulement une nourriture matérielle; d'ailleurs exquise, mais dans une sorte de Cène sociale
(C. G., p. 512).

The invariable refreshment at the gathering after dinner is tea or orangeade :

De vieux amis de M. et Mme de Guermites venaient les voir après dîner, "en cure-dents" aurait dit Mme Swann, sans être attendus, et prenaient l'hiver une tasse de tilleul aux lumières du grand salon, l'été un verre d'orangeade dans la nuit du petit bout de jardin rectangulaire. On n'avait jamais connu, des Guermites, dans ces après-dîners au jardin, que l'orangeade. Elle avait quelque chose de rituel ... On admira mon influence parce que je pus à l'orangeade faire ajouter une carafe contenant du jus de cerise cuite, de poire cuite ... Malgré ces compotes, l'orangeade traditionnelle subsista comme le tilleul. Sous ces modestes espèces, la communion sociale n'en avait pas moins lieu
(C. G., p. 513),

Marcel seems delighted with this form of 'communion', especially as the guests at the Guermites' receptions are chosen largely for their wit, and he becomes one of the most sought after guests. His special drink is a mark of favour, perhaps a recognition of his originality, a type of 'otherness' which Marcel cultivates. However, we soon see that these gatherings are far from attaining the harmony of an ideal communion. Marcel himself is peeved when a prince "comme tous les gens dépourvus d'imagination, mais non d'avarice, s'émerveillent de ce que vous buvez et vous demandent la permission d'en prendre un peu" (C. G., p. 513) - it is possible that Marcel takes his different concoctions as a tribute

to his imagination, and is thus doubly miffed about having to share them. Mme de Guermantes is even more outspoken in her dislike of offering refreshments and company to those who do not come up to her intellectual standards. "Maints vieillards venaient recevoir chez la duchesse, en même temps que l'invariable boisson, un accueil souvent assez peu aimable ... Mais ce fut par la véritable méchanceté de Mme de Guermantes que je fus révolté quand, la princesse de Parme ayant timidement proposé d'en parler elle-même et pour son compte au général, la duchesse fit tout ce qu'elle put pour en détourner l'Altesse" (C. G., pp. 513-515). That is, she makes rude comments about the general who, not at all deaf, can hear them perfectly well.

It is no wonder, then, that Marcel has now recovered from his love for Mme de Guermantes. But he has not been cured of his desire to find the perfect union with others, and seeks it once again in love, society having failed him. In his love affair with Albertine, the same themes and symbols recur, but with a depth of unhappiness which marks, indeed, the lowest point of Marcel's life. At first, however, Albertine's love brings "un pouvoir d'apaisement tel que je n'en avais pas éprouvé de pareil depuis les soirs lointains de Combray où ma mère penchée sur mon lit venait m'apporter le repos dans un baiser" (P., p. 77) and he uses the symbol of the communion to describe her kiss, although he is aware of a certain 'sacrilege' in so doing :

elle (Albertine) glissait dans ma bouche sa langue, comme un pain quotidien, comme un aliment nourrissant et ayant le caractère presque sacré de toute chair à qui les souffrances que nous avons endurées à cause d'elle ont fini par conférer une sorte de

douceur morale, ce que j'évoque aussitôt par comparaison, ce n'est pas la nuit que le capitaine de Borodino me permit de passer au quartier, par une faveur qui ne guérissait en somme qu'un malaise éphémère, mais celle où mon père envoya maman dormir dans le petit lit à côté du mien. Tant la vie, si elle doit une fois de plus nous délivrer, contre toute prévision, de souffrances qui paraissaient inévitables, le fait dans des conditions différentes, opposées parfois, jusqu'au point qu'il y a presque un sacrilège apparent à constater l'identité de la grâce octroyée!

(P., p. 10).

This passage recalls not only the kiss Marcel demanded from his mother, "sa figure ... comme une hostie pour une communion de paix", but also the way in which Marcel expects his friend (Saint-Loup) and his mistress (Albertine) to replay to some extent the drama of the night which his mother spent with him, playing her role of comforting him to sleep ⁽⁵⁾. Soon, Albertine fails him, and just serves to emphasize all the more his isolation. "Combien je souffrais de cette position où nous a réduits l'oubli de la nature qui, en instituant la division des corps, n'a pas songé à rendre possible l'interpénétration des âmes!" (P., p. 386). Marcel in his wish for complete union with his love, invokes myth and religion, from Plato the myth of the first race of men being androgynous (S. G., p. 981), from the Bible the story of Eve once being part of Adam. "O grandes attitudes de l'Homme et de la Femme où cherchent à se joindre, dans l'innocence des premiers jours et avec l'humilité de l'argile, ce que la Création a séparé" (P., p. 79). He dreams of women created from his own body during sleep - "Quelquefois, comme Eve naquit d'une côté d'Adam, une femme naissait pendant mon sommeil d'une fausse position de ma cuisse" (C. S., p. 4) - and feels, during his imprisonment of Albertine, that his Aunt Léonie's soul (perhaps there was something

(5) Butor, Michel : Les Sept Femmes de Gilbert le Mauvais, L'Arc, no. 47, Marcel Proust, Aix-en-Provence, 1971, p. 41.

in her pseudo-communions) has transmigrated into his own body (P., p. 78, 9). When Marcel drifts into sleep, he finds his sleep peopled with sexually ambiguous creatures, "La race qui l'habite, comme celle des premiers humains, est androgyne" (S. G., p. 981). He also feels, watching Albertine sleep, that he possesses her entirely. Thus, we can see Franz Hellens' point when he says "Albertine endormie, c'est Proust lui-même qui se regarde, Endymion qui ne doit plus se réveiller ... Proust penché sur le sommeil d'Albertine, est comme Narcisse sur le miroir de l'eau" (6). In other words, is it not possible to see in Albertine the sleeping or imprisoned female part of Proust (or Marcel?) especially as Marcel, like his aunt, tries to make the room or house in which he lives (and in this case, in which he has imprisoned Albertine) an extension of himself, a symbol for his mind. Michel Philip expresses this idea well. "In the Platonic myth to which Proust alludes, the creature longs for reunion with his lost half; in Proust's novel, Albertine recovers her lost masculine half and incarnates for the reader - and certainly for the writer - the ideal hermaphrodite that the author felt was his own true essence" (7). Thus, whilst on one level Albertine is definitely a character in her own right, a person who emphasizes to Marcel his inability to really know another, on a different level, she may be "la jeune fille, Galatée qui s'éveille à peine dans l'inconscient de ce corps d'homme où elle est enfermée" (S. G., p. 621). As for that symbol of communion in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, the tea, in his affair with Albertine, it spells only jealousy for Marcel, as

(6) Hellens, Franz : Avant-Propos, Hommage à Marcel Proust, Paris-déc. 1952, p. 8.

(7) Philip, Michel : The Hidden Onlooker, Proust, Yale French Studies 1965, pp. 41-42.

Albertine chooses to take it in the company of girl friends (P., p. 96). At this point in his life, Marcel says "L'homme est l'être qui ne peut sortir de soi, qui ne connaît les autres qu'en soi, et, en disant le contraire, ment" (F., p. 450). Thus, it is not surprising that the tea and madeleine which evoke in Marcel the sensation of time recaptured is a solitary meal, leading to self awareness or communion.

As we might expect, the really important tea given to Marcel is not his aunt's country panacea, nor Odette's British tea, nor the customary Guermantes' tilleul (though his last moment out of time occurs in conjunction with his final Guermantes' reception), but a humble ordinary tea, reminiscent of the Combray tilleul, given to him by his mother. Although Marcel does not insist on the fact of the donor, we are not surprised that Marcel can resist the lure of tea as a love potion or a social convention, or even a habit, offered by individuals who are very self-centered, while finding a true self-communion in the tea given to him by the one person who, motivated by mother-love, puts him first. As for the symbol of the cake, a quotation from Jean Santeuil (whose hero had the same need for a good-night kiss as does Marcel) will serve to show us the importance of the kiss, the fear of death which it assuages, and the symbolic need for a food which will lead to some kind of resurrection :

Ce baiser-là, c'était le doux viatique, attendu si fiévreusement que Jean s'efforçait de ne penser à rien en se déshabillant, pour franchir plus vite le moment qui l'en séparait, la douce offrande de gâteaux que les Grecs attachaient au cou de l'épouse ou de

l'ami défunt en le couchant dans sa tombe, pour qu'il accomplît sans terreur le voyage souterrain, traversât rassasié les royaumes sombres.

(8)

The tea releases memories buried in Marcel's mind precisely because he is not in the habit of taking it. At first glance, the most famous of Proust's passages on the tilleul and madeleine seems to be a vehicle for his philosophy of time; however, a closer inspection shows that the symbols tie together many of Proust's themes, and give, finally, a depth of meaning to the idea of communion :

Il y avait déjà bien des années que, de Combray, tout ce qui n'était pas le théâtre et le drame de mon coucher, n'existait plus pour moi, quand un jour d'hiver, comme je rentrais à la maison, ma mère, voyant que j'avais froid, me proposa de me faire prendre, contre mon habitude, un peu de thé. Je refusai d'abord et, je ne sais pas pourquoi me ravisai. Elle envoya chercher un de ces gâteaux courts et dodus appelés Petites Madeleines qui semblent avoir été moulés dans la valve rainurée d'une coquille de Saint-Jacques. Et bientôt, machinalement, accablé par la morne journée et la perspective d'un triste lendemain, je portai à mes lèvres une cuillerée du thé où j'avais laissé s'amollir un morceau de madeleine. Mais à l'instant même où la gorgée mêlée des miettes du gâteau toucha mon palais, je tressaillis, attentif à ce qui se passait d'extraordinaire en moi. Un plaisir délicieux m'avait envahi, isolé, sans la notion de sa cause. Il m'avait aussitôt rendu les vicissitudes de la vie indifférentes, ses désastres inoffensifs, sa brièveté illusoire, de la même façon qu'opère l'amour, en me remplissant d'une essence précieuse : ou plutôt cette essence n'était pas en moi, elle était moi. J'avais cessé de me sentir médiocre, contingent, mortel. D'où avait pu me venir cette puissante joie? Je sentais qu'elle était liée au goût du thé et du gâteau, mais qu'elle le dépassait infiniment, ne devait pas être de même nature. D'où venait-elle? Que signifiait-elle?... Je bois une seconde gorgée où je ne trouve rien de plus que dans la première ... Il est clair que la vérité que je cherche n'est pas en lui, mais en moi ... Je pose la tasse et me tourne vers mon esprit. C'est à lui de trouver la vérité. Mais comment? Grave incertitude, toutes les fois que l'esprit se sent dépassé par lui-même; quand lui, le chercheur, est tout ensemble le pays obscur où il doit chercher et où tout son bagage ne lui sera de rien. Chercher? pas seulement : créer. Il est en face de quelque chose qui n'est pas encore et que seul il peut réaliser, puis faire entrer dans sa lumière. (C. S., p. 44, 5).

(8) Proust, Marcel : Jean Santeuil, Vol. 1, Librairie Gallimard, 1952, pp. 65-66.

Marcel does not place this incident precisely in the chronology of his life; however, it occurs many years after Marcel's family have moved to Paris, away from the childhood Combray of which Marcel retains so few memories, in other words, during or, more probably, after the period of his love affair with Albertine. Thus, the winter day, warmed by his mother's solicitude and the hot cup of tea, then, may as well be a detail from a psychological, as well as a real season. During, and after, his unhappy interlude with Albertine, "le soir prématuré de (sa) vie, qui semblait devoir être aussi brève qu'un jour d'hiver" (P., p. 112), Marcel is vouchsafed two glimpses of joy, one through hearing Vinteuil's septet and the one we are now discussing, a vision of the past resurrected by the memories associated with the taste of a cup of tea and a piece of cake. Despite the seeming disparity in importance, the humble cup of tea is a symbol as rich as the septet, and has as great a role to play in Marcel's quest. In this particular passage, we can see particularly well the symbolic implications of the tea and madeleine, especially as associated with the theme of the quest (here, a mental, internal, or 'spiritual' journey, hence the appropriateness of the religious overtones). The little cakes, by their shell shape, bring three ideas to Marcel's mind. One is the pious journey, or pilgrimage, since the cockle shell was the badge of the pilgrim. Another is the idea of resurrection suggested by the revival of old memories, and symbolically, by the name Madeleine, as the latter was the first person to see the resurrected Christ, a fact of which Proust was well aware (C. G., p. 160). The other (perhaps suggested too in

the biblical associations of the name Madeleine - the converted or pious, prostitute) is a sensual image of the female organ. Later, this metaphor is made explicit; "et son ventre ... se refermait, à la jonction des cuisses, par deux valves d'une courbe aussi assoupie, aussi reposante, aussi claustrale que celle de l'horizon quand le soleil a disparu" (P., p. 79). Even here we can see, thus, a mixture of religion and sensuality, such as Marcel enjoyed in picturing Mlle de Stermaria as a nun. Marcel relishes "celle (la forme) ... du petit coquillage de pâtisserie, si grassement sensuel sous son plissage sévère et dévot" (C. S., p. 47). It is as though the forbidding exterior - the shell of the mollusc, the habit of the nun - adds piquancy to the sweetness and softness within. Both Swann and Marcel want to believe that their sweethearts are hard to attain. Marcel is further reminded of love by the intensity of emotion the drink releases in him, an intensity which renders all other things unimportant.

However, if we are to judge by the example of Swann, the serious business of the artistic pilgrimage, the spiritual or semi-religious experience which the tea seems to promise, is hindered by love. Caught by his converted courtesan, safe in a shell of domesticity, Swann's way of life is so rigid and unmoving that only the young Marcel could hope to see any Romance or symbolism in "son (Swann's) manteau de pèlerine" (C. S., p. 415). The mature Marcel, through Albertine's death, escapes the prison he makes of love, and can continue on his quest. This tilleul passage gives us a very good impression of Proust's version of

(9) The underlining is my own.

an internal quest. We have already watched Marcel seeking in love and in society (especially in the Guermantes' salon) a perfect communion. Here, Proust seems to have found a goal similar to that of the most famous quest, the search for the grail, which could provide physical and spiritual nourishment equated, at least in Wagner's version, with communion. The fellowship, in this legend, however, is as important as the magic or spiritual food and we have already seen that Marcel's spiritual meal is a solitary one. In the tea passage, Proust comes as near as he can to using the idea of the communion literally. "Cette essence n'était pas en moi, elle était moi. J'avais cessé de me sentir médiocre, contingent, mortel. D'où avait pu me venir cette puissante joie? Je sentais qu'elle était liée au goût du thé et du gâteau, mais qu'elle le dépassait infiniment, ne devait pas être de même nature" (C. S., p. 45) ⁽⁹⁾. Here we have food and drink which makes Marcel feel immortal. Later, indeed, in the final Guermantes' salon, Marcel classes the tilleul amongst those marvellous objects which bring back the past - "la céleste nourriture" (T. R., p. 873) which causes a small and humble resurrection of the past and thus destroys in the participant the fear of death. The joy which emanates from the tea and madeleine is a spiritual pleasure, far surpassing its material origins; indeed, we cannot help but wonder if this is Proust's attempt at introducing a type of transubstantiation into his tilleul/communion metaphor. If the spiritual component in the tea and madeleine is provided by the 'dead' Marcel of the past as it is by Christ in the communion, this is not the first time that Marcel has compared himself to Christ. Like Christ, he

(9) The underlining is my own.

has received gifts from the Magus, (Swann), and, like him, will suffer a martyrdom. The hope of resurrection, the spiritual joy, the token celestial food and drink (tea/wine, madeleine/bread) are all there. And the final memory recaptured is associated with the Combray ritual of communion. "Et tout d'un coup le souvenir m'est apparu. Ce goût, c'était celui du petit morceau de madeleine que le dimanche matin à Combray (parce que ce jour-là je ne sortais pas avant l'heure de la messe), quand j'allais lui dire bonjour dans sa chambre, ma tante Léonie m'offrait après l'avoir trempé dans son infusion de thé ou de tilleul" (C. S., pp. 46-47). Or, in the grail tradition, there is a vessel from which a magical quantity of objects is produced; that is, from the cup of tea springs all Marcel's memories of Combray. "des fleurs, des maisons, des personnages consistants et reconnaissables, de même maintenant toutes les fleurs de notre jardin et celles du parc de M. Swann, et les nymphéas de la Vivonne, et les bonnes gens du village et leurs petits logis et l'église et tout Combray et ses environs, tout cela qui prend forme et solidité, est sorti, ville et jardins, de ma tasse de thé" (C. S., pp. 47-48). Thus, the cup of tea is the receptacle which holds so much of Marcel's own life. Or, as Proust's metaphor progresses, it is an image for his own mind; by concentrating on the tea, looking into its depths, Marcel can search deeper and deeper into his own mind, until he finds the memory he was looking for. The cup and his mind both contain the essence of time past. In fact, Time is the true 'grail' which Marcel is seeking to recapture. As he says at one point : "Une heure n'est pas qu'une heure, c'est un vase rempli de parfums, de sons, de projets et

de climats" (T. R., p. 889). Swann, in the aridity of his life, where tea means domesticity, never lets a perfume or the essence of a piece of music remind him of anything but his love affair with Odette, which thus acts as a stopper on the rest of his past.

When we examine more closely this internal quest, we find other interesting images and themes, for, in Proust's novel, the journey is as important as, and far more time consuming than, the arrival.

Certes, ce qui palpite ainsi au fond de moi, ce doit être l'image, le souvenir visuel, qui, lié à cette saveur, tente de la suivre jusqu'à moi. Mais il se débat trop loin, trop confusément; à peine si je perçois le reflet neutre où se confond l'insaisissable tourbillon des couleurs remuées; mais je ne peux distinguer la forme, lui demander, comme au seul interprète possible, de me traduire le témoignage de sa contemporaine, de son inséparable compagne, la saveur, lui demander de m'apprendre de quelle circonstance particulière, de quelle époque du passé il s'agit.

Arrivera-t-il jusqu'à la surface de ma claire conscience, ce souvenir, l'instant ancien que l'attraction d'un instant identique est venue de si loin solliciter, émouvoir, soulever tout au fond de moi? Je ne sais. Maintenant je ne sens plus rien, il est arrêté, redescendu peut-être; qui sait s'il remontera jamais de sa nuit? Dix fois il me faut recommencer, me pencher vers lui. Et chaque fois la lâcheté qui nous détourne de toute tâche difficile, de toute oeuvre importante, m'a conseillé de laisser cela, de boire mon thé en pensant simplement à mes ennuis d'aujourd'hui à mes désirs de demain qui se laissent remâcher sans peine" (C. S., p. 46).

Here, when Proust uses words like 'le reflet' and 'le tourbillon' to describe his internal search for a memory lost in his mind, when he insists that depth distorts, as it would in water, especially the sea, we realize that he is likening Marcel's mind to the cup of tea, that looking into the tea and looking into his mind are much the same thing. Perhaps this metaphor is as close as we shall ever come to a modern version of Narcissus,

though we must add in Marcel's favour that he is looking in himself for truth ("Je pose la tasse et me tourne vers mon esprit. C'est à lui de trouver la vérité"(C. S., p. 45)) not beauty, that he is searching through the curiosity of the artist ("Chercher? pas seulement : créer". (C. S., p. 45) not vanity, and that he is looking for a reflection of external objects, such as the flowers of Combray, although these are now part of his mind. Proust also uses 'le tourbillon' to express a confusion of emotions, as we shall see in the rose chapter, which deals with his love affair with Albertine. However, here, 'le tourbillon' of confusion is rather akin to that felt on wakening, as in the phrase 'le tourbillon du réveil' (C. S., p. 187), hence Proust's insistence that the memory must journey through the dark, or night, in his mind towards the light. And, in fact, as we have seen in the introduction, the one country worth exploring is 'le pays obscur', of the poet's mind. This, then, is the true pilgrimage, the one true journey into the past. Like all pilgrimages, it is a difficult trip, to undertake it at all the quester must overcome his laziness. So far in Marcel's experience, he has come across only one other approximation to the 'true pilgrimage' - that provided by dreams :

Les poètes prétendent que nous retrouvons un moment ce que nous avons jadis été en rentrant dans telle maison, dans tel jardin où nous avons vécu jeunes. Ce sont là pèlerinages fort hasardeux et à la suite desquels on compte autant de déceptions que de succès. Les lieux fixes, contemporains d'années différentes, c'est en nous-même qu'il vaut mieux les trouver. C'est à quoi peuvent, dans une certaine mesure, nous servir une grande fatigue que suit une bonne nuit. Celles-là, pour nous faire descendre dans les galeries les plus souterraines du sommeil, où aucun reflet de la veille, aucune lueur de mémoire n'éclairent plus le monologue intérieur, si tant est que lui-même n'y cesse pas,

retournent si bien le sol et le tuf de notre corps qu'elles nous font retrouver, là où nos muscles plongent et tordent leurs ramifications et aspirent la vie nouvelle, le jardin où nous avons été enfant. (C. G., p. 91).

However, when we read the accounts of some of Marcel's dreams, we realize that they distort the past just as water distorts an object lying beneath it. They are part of the dark, part of the confused depths which Marcel must search - "le pays obscur" (C. S., p. 45) of his mind. And, eventually, during his sojourn with Albertine, the dark part of his life, he fears sleep as a precursor of death. "Et souvent une heure de sommeil de trop est une attaque de paralysie ... On a trop dormi, on n'est plus" (P., p. 123). Thus, the awakening from sleep is like a 'resurrection'. Awakening and dawn in real and symbolic terms, bring a truer vision. There is an undertone of myth in Marcel's longing to find the garden where he was young, and it is thus all the more fitting that the resurrection of the Combray gardens should be effected by an infusion of flowers, which had moreover, associations through bedridden Aunt Léonie with his childhood religion. However, all the flower studies in this thesis (especially the hawthorn) will illustrate the basic pattern of the novel moving from sleep to awakening. The physical awakening in the introduction presages a spiritual awakening later in the novel.

Although chronologically the episode of the tea-drinking occurs late in Marcel's life, Proust reinforces the symmetry of the novel by placing it at the beginning. Thus, the book takes a form similar to

that of the snake who holds his tail in its mouth; the end being near the beginning. The book does, in fact, end with another 'moment out of time' or resurrection of the past very similar to the tea scene, whose significance becomes then all the more clear to Marcel, thus completing the circle. This final 'awakening' occurs at, or just before, the Guermantes' last matinée.

As we will see, all the themes and symbols are resolved in this closing section. Once again we see tea as part of a social ritual. For Mme. Verdurin, at least, her 'religion' of social success, her rituals, her 'religious orthodoxy' in organizing her salon, have paid off, for she is now the new Princess of Guermantes. Princess or not, she is as ridiculous and as unaesthetic as ever - "On entendait la princesse de Guermantes (Mme Verdurin) répéter d'un air exalté et d'une voix de ferraille que lui faisait son râtelier : 'Oui, c'est cela, nous ferons clan!' " (T. R., p. 984). However, so closely interwoven are Proust's patterns, that he makes the affected Mme Verdurin the person responsible for introducing Vinteuil's work into society. Mme Swann, too, a pupil of Mme Verdurin's one might say, was also known for her social teas. Most of all, however, tea to her was associated with love. Even now, she wishes to tell Marcel of the story of her love affairs over a cup of tea. "Venez prendre une fois le thé avec moi, je vous raconterai comment j'ai fait la connaissance de M. de Forcheville" (T. R., p. 1021), she says, in a voice which has scarcely changed with time. "Cette voix était restée la même, inutilement chaude, prenante, avec un rien d'accent anglais" (T. R., p. 950). Just as Odette seemed to symbolize

the beginning of Marcel's involvement with love, now she seems to herald its end. Marcel has no more serious love affairs after Albertine's death; as with Odette, love becomes a matter of old memories for the sake of which he must suffer and must write his novel.

In its most important role, the tilleul reappears at this last grand reception as one of those objects which inspire the moments out of time that Marcel so prizes. Along with the sensation caused by the uneven paving, the taste of the madeleine and tea fills Marcel with the confidence that the past is not lost; it can be recaptured and recorded :

Mais au moment où, me remettant d'aplomb, je posai mon pied sur un pavé qui était un peu moins élevé que le précédent, tout mon découragement s'évanouit devant la même félicité qu'à diverses époques de ma vie m'avaient donnée la vue d'arbres que j'avais cru reconnaître dans une promenade en voiture autour de Balbec, la vue des clochers de Martinville, la saveur d'une madeleine trempée dans une infusion, tant d'autres sensations dont j'ai parlé et que les dernières oeuvres de Vinteuil m'avaient paru synthétiser.
(T. R., p. 866).

Of all the sensations Marcel mentions, the taste of the tea and madeleine is the one to which he returns again and again, perhaps because of his delight in any synthesizing element. If the water-lily joined earth, water, and sky through its long stem, the lime-flower, with its flame-like petals joined fire and water, in the main description of it in Du Côté de Chez Swann. Then, the tea as a ritual unites Aunt Léonie and Marcel; Odette and Swann; the Swanns, the Verdurins and the Guermantes. But most of all, the tea links the past to the present :

l'être qui alors goûtait en moi cette impression la goûtait en ce qu'elle avait de commun dans un jour ancien et maintenant ... un être qui ... pouvait ... jouir de l'essence des choses, c'est-

à-dire en dehors du temps. Cela expliquait que mes inquiétudes au sujet de ma mort eussent cessé au moment où j'avais reconnu inconsciemment le goût de la petite madeleine, puisqu'à ce moment-là l'être que j'avais été était un être extra-temporel. (T. R., p. 871).

Marcel adds :

... notre vrai moi qui ... semblait mort ... s'éveille ... en recevant la céleste nourriture qui lui est apportée. Une minute affranchie de l'ordre du temps a recréé en nous, pour la sentir, l'homme affranchi de l'ordre du temps. Et celui-là, on comprend qu'il soit confiant dans sa joie, même si le simple goût d'une madeleine ne semble pas contenir logiquement les raisons de cette joie. (T. R., p. 873).

This, then, is the true 'resurrection' and eternal life promised by the 'holy food' of self communion; Marcel now understands fully "le miracle d'une analogie" (T. R., p. 871) with all of its concomitant joy. It lifts all his doubts about the reality of literature and about his own literary gifts and it gives him the subject of his novel - Time. And yet, ironically, at this high point of his spiritual life, with his certainty of a vocation, Marcel entertains doubts as to his physical ability to finish his work of art. He experiences a fear of death's, of illness' or accident's preventing his fulfilling his task, a fear which reminds us of the hypochondria which his old Aunt Léonie, in her own stead, assuaged with a good, hot, comforting cup of tea.

However, now it is up to Marcel to modify his own needs the strange half-life of his aunt, as symbolized in the dried lime-flowers. Her eccentric seclusion he must change to "les exaltantes vertus de la solitude" (P., p. 25). The routine of her Combray life (of which the

tea is a part) will become to him "un prosaïsme qui sert de grand réservoir de poésie à celui qui les traverse sans y avoir vécu" (C. S., p. 49). Even in Marcel's statement that "Elle (his aunt) prêtait à ses moindres sensations une importance extraordinaire" (C. S., p. 50) we can see the origin of the writer's dedication to detail which forms the basis of his inspired moments out of time. And, in the humorous picture of the 'stigmata' of Aunt Léonie's martyrdom, on her forehead "où les vertèbres transparaissaient comme les pointes d'une couronne d'épines ... " (C. S., p. 52) we find a mild presentiment of the masochism which urges Marcel to create a work of art to expiate the wrongs he feels he did to his grandmother and to Albertine, to make use of his and their suffering, to fulfil the promise to his grandmother, and to erect "un grand cimetière" (T. R., p. 903) to their half obliterated names. Yet even this is not enough, and he exclaims :

je me demandais si tout de même une oeuvre d'art dont elles (Albertine and his grandmother) ne seraient pas conscientes serait pour elles, pour le destin de ces pauvres mortes, un accomplissement. Ma grand'mère que j'avais, avec tant d'indifférence, vue agoniser et mourir près de moi! O puissé-je, en expiation, quand mon oeuvre serait terminée, blessé sans remède, souffrir de longues heures, abandonné de tous, avant de mourir! (T. R., p. 902).

In talking of his efforts to keep the memory of his grandmother alive, Marcel says, " ... je ne me la rappelais vraiment que par la douleur, et j'aurais voulu que s'enfonçassent plus solidement encore en moi ces clous qui y rivaient sa mémoire" (S. G., p. 759) ⁽¹⁰⁾. And in talking

(10) The underlining is my own.

further of his memories of Albertine and his grandmother, Marcel also mentions, in addition to the previous image of self-crucifixion, his martyrdom (F., p. 535), his calvary, (F., p. 543) and his crown of thorns (S. G., p. 768). Thank goodness, as we have seen, all this suffering does lead to a resurrection, not only for Marcel, but also for his loved ones, his friends, and even, of course, his old Aunt Léonie, the ritual of whose life creeps into his own, where, for better or for worse, it is much intensified. They will all come to life again in the minds of the readers of Marcel's novel, the culmination of a life of devotion by Marcel. So, despite the fact that Aunt Léonie thought reading just a pleasant pastime, nephew and aunt are bound by the ritual and religious symbolism, the life of devotion linked with the tilleul . The nephew has the power to wrest from it the larger share of spiritual achievement - and the larger share of suffering.

The Hawthorne and Associated Symbolism :

The Artist's Quest

The water-lilies and the tilleul, then, belong to that part of Marcel's childhood which could be called the calm before the storm, or, to continue the extended metaphor of Proust's introduction, the period before experience and self-knowledge have quite awakened Marcel to the disturbing realities which may lie behind even such a peaceful facade as Combray possesses. Aunt Léonie is only an exaggerated example of those folk who choose to ignore (often in the most polite fashion) any unpleasant facts of Combray life. She takes to her bed and to the ultimate refuge of sleep, and, finally, death. Like Pascal's non-believers, she also derives comfort from such rituals as the tea-making which divert her mind from seeking some more meaningful task in life, or any meaning in life at all; hence Proust's likening her routine to the aimless movement of the water-lilies or the repetitive labours of Dante's dead.

Marcel is at first a true child of this way of life. He hates storms, cannot bear to watch his grandmother being teased, and looks forward to the time when, no longer under his parent's control, he can drift on the surface of life as a rower, who, abandoning his oars, consigns himself to the currents of the Vivonne. However, fortunately and symbolically for Marcel the future artist, sleep and routine offer him very little refuge. He is already something of an insomniac, and the one obsessive ritual in his life, that of his mother's good-night kiss, finally opens his eyes to his own weaknesses and those of his parents. When his parents (especially his father) transgress their rigid code

of discipline, making excuses for the lack of will power which prevents Marcel from going to sleep without a good-night kiss, Marcel, who expected the most severe punishment, starts to fight (one might even say to punish) these weaknesses in himself. A life without responsibilities becomes, not an allurements, but a sign of failure. On the more positive side, Marcel possesses a tremendous curiosity, which equips him better to question than to accept. Thus, he explores the deeper meaning of the tea and madeleine. Most of all, however, Marcel's questioning of the values of his childhood Combray is a necessary step in the universal quest of any courageous individual for maturity and self-knowledge. Once this goal is attained, Marcel will also have completed his own personal quest for time past mentioned in Proust's title for the novel. Proust himself confessed to Jacques Rivière that the novel contained as well the story of his own quest for truth ⁽¹⁾. And, the return of his faith in art does, at the end of his quest, give Marcel both the courage to face the truth and the means with which to recapture time past in his novel.

Combray, which offers Marcel the tilleul and the water-lily, also offers him the hawthorn as a suitable emblem of, indeed an introduction to, his quest. True to its promise, the hawthorn is associated with nearly all the important adventures of Marcel's 'apprenticeship as a man of letters' (T. R., p. 907). Each new turning, each new trial or temptation, each further revelation, as we shall see when we discuss the colour symbolism of the pattern of the quest, is marked or introduced by a hawthorn

(1) Proust et Rivière : Correspondance 1914-1922, présentée et annotée par Philip Kolb, Librairie Plon, Paris, 1955, pp. 1-2.

passage. We shall later see that the choice of such a flower to show the stages in Marcel's apprenticeship or quest was a very astute one, as the hawthorn can be found in the chivalric tales of Charlemagne and in the grail legend, which describes the most famous quest of all. However, when we trace the hawthorn through Proust's works, we find that, in his earlier writing anyway, he seems unaware of these associations, choosing the hawthorns (along with the apple tree) for their freshness as a symbol or image in literature, a freshness which allows him to endow them with a wealth of personal meaning without indulging in the 'sin' of idolatry. Proust calls this 'sin' "le péché intellectuel des artistes", which makes them love a flower for its artistic associations rather than for itself.

Il n'est pas dans la nature de forme particulière, si belle soit-elle, qui vaille autrement que par la part de la beauté infinie qui a pu s'y incarner ; pas même la fleur du pommier, pas même la fleur de l'épine rose. Mon amour pour elles est infini et les souffrances (hay fever) que me cause leur voisinage me permettent de leur donner chaque printemps des preuves de cet amour qui ne sont pas à la portée de tous. Mais même envers elles, envers elles si peu littéraires, se rapportant si peu à une tradition esthétique ... je me garderai toujours d'un culte exclusif qui s'attacherait en elles à autre chose qu'à la joie qu'elles nous donnent, un culte au nom de qui, par un retour égoïste sur nous-mêmes, nous en ferions "nos" fleurs, et prendrions soin de les honorer en ornant notre chambre des oeuvres d'art où elles sont figurées. Non, je ne trouverai pas un tableau plus beau parce que l'artiste aura peint au premier plan une aubépine, bien que je ne connaisse rien de plus beau que l'aubépine, car je veux rester sincère et que je sais que la beauté d'un tableau ne dépend pas des choses qui y sont représentées. Je ne collectionnerai pas les images de l'aubépine. Je ne vénère pas l'aubépine, je (2) vais la voir et la respirer.

Since suffering through love is basic to Marcel's quest, as we shall see, Proust's reference to the agonies of hay fever caused by his

(2) Proust, Marcel : Pastiches et Mélanges, Editions Gallimard, 1971, pp. 136-7.

beloved hawthorns is singularly apt. Indeed, we shall find the theme of hay fever, when associated with a love affair, to be particularly significant in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. Although Proust denies any literary background to the hawthorn and the apple, popular tradition most commonly associates the apple with the fruit of the tree of knowledge ⁽³⁾, and literature does pay heed to this misconception, as in Milton's Paradise Lost (Book ix, line 585) ⁽⁴⁾. In a similar fashion, the hawthorn, especially the pink hawthorn which Proust so often associates with tempting things to eat, will be for Marcel a flower of temptation and knowledge, both sexual and intellectual. If anything, the intellectual temptation to idolatry, the worship of the hawthorns as an emblem of beauty or a symbol of youth, will be stronger than the physical temptation offered by Gilberte under the pink hawthorns.

Proust, then, invested a great deal of private symbolism in the hawthorns. Yet, whether he knew it or not, traditional symbolism, too, picks this flower as the flower of the quest. In France, the hawthorn is considered "l'épine noble", reminiscent of Jesus' crown of thorns and of the "Holy Crown" which blossomed afresh and filled the air with the scent of hawthorn when Charlemagne knelt before it ⁽⁵⁾. In England, the hawthorn is associated with the grail legend; supposedly the staff Joseph of Arimathea (keeper of the grail) planted at Glastonbury

(3) Brewer, Rev. C. : A Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, Cassell & Co., London, 1962, p. 55

(4) Milton : Paradise Lost, Prentice-Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1961, p. 234.

(5) Carruthers : Flower Lore, Belfast, (1879?), p. 13.

grew into a hawthorn which blooms every Christmas Eve ⁽⁶⁾. Further associations with the Maypole fertility rites and even earlier purification ceremonies we will discuss later in the context of the Month of Mary and the character of Mlle Vinteuil.

We can see in these references to traditional myths, that the quest of the grail may well be a mixture of old and new religions, Christianity and fertility or initiation rites, as Jessie Weston points out in her persuasive book From Ritual to Romance. Indeed, at one point the tree reblossoming may have been a more important symbol than the grail. It is in no way the task of this thesis to untangle such a complicated pattern of influences. All that we can say as far as Proust is concerned is that, as far as we know, his sole source of knowledge of the grail legend was Wagner's operas, overtly Christian, but reflecting sometimes their debt to older myths. In Parsifal (and to some extent Lohengrin) Proust became acquainted with the grail legend. Briefly, Parsifal's role in the quest is to cure the Fisher King, wounded when he succumbs to sexual temptation. In the older versions, the Fisher King becomes impotent and the land barren. In Wagner's version, the King can no longer carry out his function as keeper of the grail, dispensing its holy food as though at mass. Parsifal must cure the King, and, in the older versions, restore fertility to the land. In Wagner's version, he must restore a spiritual peace without falling into the same trap as the Fisher King before him. He must retain his 'purity'. Proust

(6) Brewer, Rev. C. : A Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, p. 481.

encountered not only the legend of the grail quest in Wagner's operas, but also the theme of the barren staff reblossoming with the return of faith (7). Proust himself was more interested in the aesthetic possibilities of such legends as storehouses of symbols, universal themes, and patterns than with their use as religious rites or (in Wagner's case) as didactic tales. Thus, we find that whilst Proust borrowed names and some symbols from Wagner's Parsifal, his actual conception of the theme of the quest stayed closer to the spirit of the older rites of initiation, in which the loss of innocence, the suffering, the sexual knowledge were not deviations from the path but necessary steps along the way (8). And the successful achievement of Marcel's quest, too, leads to new life, a new creation; in Proust's version, an aesthetic creation. Both François Girard and Germaine Brée have shrewd comments to make on the importance of Christianity and older rites to Proust. "Though the Christian significance of Remembrance of Things Past remained metaphorical for him, he (Proust) viewed this metaphor as the supreme aesthetic achievement" (9).

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- (7) Proust, Marcel : Lettre à Suzette Lemaire, Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust et des Amis de Combray, no. 14, 1974, p. 137.
- (8) In their introduction to Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival, the source from which Wagner derived his opera, Helen Mustard and Charles Passage make this comment on modern versions of Parzival, "The less sober public on the other hand, too frequently forced these works to stand as patriotic monuments of edification chaste and unmarred by the problems of the day. Thus Wagner's Parsifal, splendid as it may be musically, is a literary work, wholly alien in spirit to the work it professes to dramatize." Introduction, Parzival, Vintage Books, New York, 1961, p. iv.
- (9) Girard, René : Proust, 20th Century Views, Introduction, Prentice-Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1962, p. 11.

All human beings in Proust's world are like M. de Charlus and Prometheus, tied to the rock of matter by force and necessity and all are strange hybrids, like the mythological race of beings born of the nuptials of a nymph and a bird. The artist is the hero who can deliver the god held captive in the man, a view that blends well with certain interpretations of the Orphic mysteries ... It is to the Orphic mysteries rather than to the Greek tragedies that Proust's vision is keyed. (10)

It is extremely interesting that of all the chthonic cults, Germaine Brée should mention especially the cult of Orpheus. Orpheus, of course, was also an artist - a poet and a musician - and, according to one version of the legend, a homosexual. The pattern of his journey to the underworld and return to life, a pattern common to initiation or fertility myths, we shall see repeated in Marcel's quest; Marcel, too, enters the dark part of his life for the sake of a woman. Swann, as the cattleya chapter makes clear, never quite manages to quit the 'underworld' he has entered seeking Odette. But Marcel is drawn back to the light (apt in the context of the myth of Orpheus) by music, Vinteuil's joyous, sunny, septet, to be exact. Germaine Brée also has some interesting comments to make on the myth in general in Proust's work. She points out that Proust recognized the 'mythological cast' of a young child's mind; a child like Marcel makes gods and goddesses of the human beings surrounding him, then, with disillusionment, demotes them to human status again. The new gods are the inner forces that move man; whereas Gide explicitly gives the myth a psychological interpretation, Proust's narrator gives mythological reality to the passions that move him, animating and personifying habit, desire, and

(10) Brée, Germaine : Proust's Dormant Gods, Yale French Studies, no. 38 (May 1967), p. 193.

jealousy ⁽¹¹⁾. Amongst these voices drawing our attention to the use Proust makes of specific myths and of myths in general, one in particular mentions the grail legend. Philip Kolb tentatively suggests that A la Recherche du Temps Perdu might be "une transposition au temps moderne du chevalier en quête du Saint Graal" ⁽¹²⁾. And Rina Viers points out how important to Proust's flower imagery is the idea of "les femmes-fleurs" from Wagner's Parsifal ⁽¹³⁾.

To return to the hawthorn within the quest pattern, we must admit that it is easy to recognize Proust's debt to Wagner on a surface level. Names of characters in the opera crop up in Proust's novel, sometimes in a most obvious fashion and sometimes by a tantalizing but not obvious similarity. Themes and symbols from Parsifal also appear in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu but they usually carry a greater weight of meaning than Wagner gave them in his opera. Marcel becomes "Parsifal au milieu des filles fleurs" (C. G., p. 423) in the Guermantes' salon. So many 'flower maidens' tempt Marcel - Gilberte under the rose hawthorns, Albertine as one of "les jeunes fillès en fleurs". And the hawthorns, indeed, introduce Marcel to the concept of a virginal, coquettish, teasing love which becomes for a long time his ideal. The theme of mother love is also extremely important in Parsifal and in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. Swann, on the other hand, with his park and hawthorns from which he draws vitality (a vitality which disappears once he

(11) Ibid, p. 190.

(12) Kolb, Philip : Les Phares de Proust, Bulletin no. 16, 1966, p. 113.

(13) Viers, Rina : La Signification des Fleurs dans l'Oeuvre de Marcel Proust, Bulletin no. 25, 1975, p. 158.

deserts his land), his fish pond, his barren life once love has wounded, him, must remind us of the original Fisher King, as Wallace Fowlie points out ⁽¹⁴⁾. This character, once he has succumbed to temptation, becomes ill; the grail (analogous to artistic creativity for Swann?) moves far beyond his reach. It will be Marcel's task, in keeping with the deeper meaning of the Fisher King's story, to learn all Swann can teach him (indirectly and through his bad example) and to involve Swann in creativity again, to give him some further 'life' in his novel. Even Swann's name, which Proust insists is English in origin (F., p. 585), reminds us of the mascot birds which surround Wagner's castle of the Holy Grail. Later, when Swann has totally surrendered to his love for Odette, a room the latter has arranged and decorated in Swann's house reminds Marcel of Klingsor's laboratory, Klingsor being the impotent magician of Wagner's drama (J. F., p. 527). The name of Guermantes, too, faintly suggests that of the grail knight, Gurnemantz, whom Proust mentions in his letter to Jacques Rivière ⁽¹⁵⁾. Certainly, the name of Guermantes (redolent with the perfume of the Combray hawthorns (C. G., p. 12)) awakens in Marcel visions of a salon as holy as the gathering for the Last Supper or as chivalrous as the company of knights of the Round Table (C. G., p. 31). Of course, Marcel will find that neither society nor love will provide him with the true goal of his quest.

(14) Fowlie, Wallace : A Reading of Proust, Dennis Dobson, London, 1963, p. 276.

(15) Proust et Rivière : Correspondance 1914-22, présenté et annotée par Philip Kolb, p. 2.

Proust definitely borrows the symbol of fishing from the old myths, adding refinements of his own and using them to introduce some of his most important hawthorn passages. And the hawthorn blossom itself, carries a reminder of the chalice or grail in its calyx ('le calice' meaning either 'calyx' or 'chalice' in French), "laissant voir comme au fond d'une coupe de marbre rose, de rouges sanguines" (C. S., p. 194). "Une coupe", too, suggests a drinking vessel. Thus, the hawthorn will be to Marcel, as the grail was to the knights of the Round Table, a sign that he is still on the path leading to his ultimate goal; any deviation from the path may lead to a loss of the hawthorns, just as the erring knight would find he could no longer see the grail.

In the context of the hawthorn symbolism, then, Proust remains true to the themes of the necessity of experience and knowledge in the earlier versions of the grail quest; he borrows names and incidents from Wagner's opera, and symbols, again, it seems, from the earlier myths. But, most of all, the pattern of Proust's hawthorn passages follows very much the general progression of incidents of the grail legend, a pattern which we shall see emerging in our discussion of Proust's colour symbolism in conjunction with the hawthorn imagery. Here, suffice it to say that the hawthorns make their first important appearance in the Combray church, a place of worship being the correct starting point for a quest. Then, too, the hawthorns seem to offer Marcel two levels of initiation, one physical, through Gilberte and 'les jeunes filles en fleurs', and one spiritual (or aesthetic) through

Vinteuil's sonata and septet. This double initiation, Jessie Weston insists, occurs also in the grail legend and is a relic of the old mystery cults ⁽¹⁶⁾. The joyous cock crow theme of Vinteuil's septet further reminds us of the cock crow which breaks the enchantment surrounding Lancelot in the incident of the chapel perilous, which Jessie Weston specifically associates with the second spiritual initiation. Vinteuil's final triumphant peal of bells, too, must remind us of the musical climax of Wagner's Parsifal, also expressed in a midday ringing of bells marking the hero's return to the Grail Castle. Marcel, at this point, needs to be freed from the dark influence of his love for Albertine. Indeed, since he met her, Marcel has hardly seen the hawthorns at all; at Balbec, he is confronted with a flowerless bush, yet he does not experience a sense of loss such as the knights of the Round Table might feel on being denied a vision of the grail, for he has built up his own image of the hawthorns (and of the young girls of Albertine's band) and thus they exist, in any case, largely in his own mind. However, this image of the hawthorn is based on false beliefs which can only be dispelled by experience, followed by a higher code of values or a more worthwhile set of beliefs presented by art. Marcel passes the final 'spiritual' trial at the last Guermantes' matinée, an episode better discussed in our analysis of the colour symbolism of the hawthorns.

(16) Weston, Jessie : From Ritual to Romance, Anchor Books, 1957, p. 182.

Proust's use of colour in conjunction with the hawthorns shows even more clearly his ability to adapt traditional symbolism to the needs of his own novel. Proust, with his Roman Catholic upbringing and his love of chivalric legends, was obviously aware of the white/red, innocence/experience dichotomy within traditional symbolism. In fact, he never quarrelled with this language of colour - only with any unquestioned values associated with the concepts the colours represented. Thus, his own representation of virginity, for example, is not a traditional one. In Christian symbolism, white commemorates the purity of Jesus and of Mary and is used on the feast of the virgins and confessors. Argent, its close cousin in blazonry, signifies truth and innocence (17). In The Quest of the Holy Grail, Galahad alone is pure enough to claim the shield bearing a cross of blood on a white background. The allegory of colours in this tale is particularly obvious; we are told expressly that white is the colour of innocence and virginity (18) and that red is a reminder of Christ's blood (19). Later, Spenser's Red Cross knight, representing Holiness, carries a similar shield with similar allegorical significance. In more recent times, such symbolism has been subjected to psychological scrutiny - Proust, indeed was a pioneer of this type of analysis. We can see his approach carried to its logical conclusion in, for example, Roger Peyrefitte. Peyrefitte points out the parallels between earthly and holy passion in an

(17) Brewer, Rev. C. : A Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, pp. 271-2.

(18) Matarosso, P. M. (translator) : The Quest of the Holy Grail, Penguin Classics, 1969, p. 159.

(19) Ibid, p. 60.

interplay of red and white symbolism which, especially since it chronicles a tragic homosexual friendship, may owe something to a knowledge of Proust's use of colour in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. Two boys in a Roman Catholic school find significance in their own lives for the biblical symbolism of white (innocence) and red (sin); "Vos péchés fussent-ils rouges comme le cramoisi, ils seront blanchis comme la neige" (20). Even more significant is the red-gowned figure of the boy who, in the church procession, represents Christ the lamb offering himself to be adored. His school friend admirer muses on the mixture of innocence and sin to be found in the love inspired by this image, and comments that red, as well as being the colour of martyrdom (a prophetic touch, since the younger boy kills himself because of their love), is also the colour of earthly love (21).

Proust, through his colour symbolism, explores just such ambiguities in the qualities which, to him, lie behind the traditional concept of innocence; idealism, which is sustained by a certain amount of timid self-deception, and virginity, which hides a repressed sexuality. Thus the white hawthorns on the Virgin Mary's altar are vibrant with inner energy. If they resemble girls, they resemble teasing, coquettish girls. If they are associated with Mlle Vinteuil, in a strange way this association is just. With her lesbian tendencies, she is (technically anyway) dedicated to virginity in that she will never give herself to

(20) Peyrefitte, Roger : Les Amitiés Particulières, Editions J'ai Lu, 1945, p. 60.

(21) Ibid, p. 87.

a man. The theme of the ambiguous nature of desire is continued in the image of the pink hawthorn. Marcel's idealism prevents him from understanding the very plain sexual invitation which Gilberte offers him through the hedge of pink hawthorns. Nor does Marcel have the experience necessary to enable him to understand the greater appeal of the pink hawthorn over the white, the flower which offers a sometimes painful truth over the one which offers innocent daydreams. Of course, the musician Vinteuil, whose daughter is so closely linked to the hawthorns, has already preceded Marcel in his quest. Thus it is particularly apt that the white hawthorns remind Marcel of an unpolished work for piano whilst the pink one reminds him of a more mature, fully orchestrated work. The parallel with Vinteuil's sonata and septet is obvious, not only in the detail of the instruments needed to play each piece, and in the relative maturity of the septet, but also in the colours the two pieces evoke for Marcel, a white innocent landscape for the sonata and a rosy dawn for the septet. The metaphor linking the hawthorns with Vinteuil's music foreshadows an important turning point in Marcel's life which further emphasizes the symbolic use of colour in Proust's work. Just when he is about to lose faith completely in art, at the darkest part of his life with Albertine (who has abandoned her bright coloured clothes for grey), Marcel hears Vinteuil's victorious, joyous septet. He is as moved by its depth and maturity compared with the tentative sonata as he was by the impact of the pink over the white hawthorn. Yet he is not completely convinced of the

superiority of maturity over youth until his final confrontation with a symbolic choice of white or red at the Guermantes' last salon. Here, he can choose to try to recapture his youth in an affair with Gilberte's daughter, a pale image of the possibilities of time yet to come, or he can accept the creative role suggested by the new Mme de Saint-Euverte, mature, red-gowned, ~~perhaps pregnant with~~ child as Marcel is with his novel. By now it should be obvious that the hawthorns introduce a pattern which continues to develop after the hawthorns have faded into the background. This confrontation of innocence versus experience, youth versus age symbolized by the contrast of white and red is the true pattern of the quest. Three, as Proust with his love of fairy tales no doubt knew, is a magic number, and Marcel experiences three separate episodes which, in their colour symbolism, offer him the role of the artist-knight or artist-martyr. In the first episode, concerning the hawthorns in Swann's park, he does not understand the significance of the colours at all; in the second, with Vinteuil's music, he understands but is too involved in life to choose the detached creative role, and on the third, confronted with the two girls at the Guermantes' party, he finally makes (for the artist) the right choice. All the original elements of the quest are there; Proust just makes his temptations rather more subtle, as they are, perhaps in modern life. And, as we shall see, his conception of innocence, virginity, and maturity are far more psychologically complex than those set forth in, for example, the straightforward

allegory of The Quest of the Holy Grail. Thus, we can see that a discussion of the hawthorns takes us far beyond the analysis of the actual flowers; yet, every time we deal with a passage confronting white with red, we must remember that first encounter of Marcel's with the pink hawthorn.

Thus, whatever spiritual values may be traditionally ascribed to certain colours in religious terms, Proust infuses them with human emotion and aesthetic values. His is essentially a human landscape no matter how many metaphors he may borrow from old or new religions. In fact, none of the characters in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, as Berl points out, are particularly moved by religious impulses, with the possible exception of Odette and Charlus, who are both naive believers ⁽²²⁾. Proust's characters direct any impulse to worship towards the works of nature, their fellow human beings, or works of art. And, in this context, with his dislike of 'idolatry', Proust mistrusts the very act of worship as an egotistical exercise which can imprison one in a network of false beliefs. Thus the hawthorn passages mark the development of Marcel's viewpoint from a haze of false beliefs (usually in other people), to a despairing loss of faith in the worth of literature, to a final resurgence of his faith in art. This movement towards, if anything, a religion of art can be traced throughout Proust's work.

(22) Berl, Emmanuel ; L'Amour, Proust, Collection Génies et Réalités, Hachette, Paris, 1965, p. 107.

We have already mentioned in the introduction a certain progression in Jean Santeuil's adoration of the hawthorns. First of all, he venerates the white hawthorns as the flowers of the Virgin Mother Mary, then he focuses the frustrated love he feels for his own mother on the pink hawthorns, and, finally, he finds his need to worship diverted towards the beauty of nature by "les fines chapelles dentelées" ⁽²³⁾ of the hawthorns. A similar progression - awe of the Virgin, adoration of various young girls, and a revelation of his vocation as an artist in the beauty of Nature occurs in Marcel's outlook - in other words away from the spiritual in the sense of the supernatural towards the natural and human world, which offer him his own spiritual goal in art. Moreover, as does the light imagery which we mentioned in the introduction, the hawthorns show the change in polarisation in Marcel's life from feminine to masculine. The Virgin Mary celebrated by the white hawthorns on the Combray altar is supplanted by various male characters whose association with art gives them a status still human, but larger than life. Before he turns to girls and then to an ideal in art offered by these male artists, however, Marcel does enjoy imagining a love lavished on him by a female artiste - La Berma, who plays a role in Phèdre that he wishes to share with her in life : "Car la Berma devait ressentir effectivement pour bien des jeunes hommes ces désirs qu'elle avouait sous le couvert du personnage de Phèdre" (J. F., p. 487). The women or girls in whom Marcel becomes interested (with the exception of Mme de Guermantes and Mme Swann, who attract Marcel by being mother

(23) Proust, Marcel : Jean Santeuil, Editions Gallimard, Vol. 1, 1952, p. 210.

figures as well as mistresses of fashionable salons) all have behind them the prestige of a father, patron, or artist friend. Behind Mlle Vinteuil, who is so closely associated with the white altar hawthorns and whose lesbianism has such far reaching consequences in Marcel's life, looms the figure of her father, the great musician. As Bastide mentions, Vinteuil is reminiscent of an old testament patriarch, with his strict code of rules for young people ⁽²⁴⁾. His daughter, like Eve before her, transgresses these rules. But, like Eve's, hers is a 'fortunate fall', in that her lover eventually ensures the publication of Vinteuil's last great manuscript. Behind Gilberte, Marcel's first love, we find not only her father, Swann, but also her artist friend, the great writer Bergotte. When his love for Gilberte is at its strongest, Marcel feels that Swann must be a marvellous person just because he is Gilberte's father. However, later, he realizes that his love for Gilberte was really only based on the fact that she was Bergotte's friend and Swann's daughter, "C'était ma croyance en Bergotte, en Swann qui m'avait fait aimer Gilberte" (T. R., p. 839). Gilberte and Swann make a similar father-daughter pair to Mlle Vinteuil and her father, and form perhaps in their lives an even better parallel of the story of Genesis. While her father is away from the park (or garden?), Gilberte tries to tempt Marcel, who already sees Tansonville as a forbidden territory. Swann, of course, has a very important role of his own, as well as being Gilberte's father. He is the owner of Tansonville and the person who influences Marcel to go to Balbec. Thus

(24) Bastide, F. R. : Proust et la Musique, Proust, Collections Génie et Réalités, p. 220.

as the 'ruler' of the park and the informal instructor of Marcel, he is, as we have already mentioned, like the Fisher King of the old legends. Or perhaps we can see Swann as the imperfect father of Galahad - Lancelot - and Marcel as Galahad himself, at least in so far as he looks upon Swann as a father-figure and in that he can reach the grail (artistic success) which is denied Swann. Finally, the person responsible for introducing Marcel to Albertine and 'les jeunes filles en fleurs' is Elstir, up to his old tricks of matchmaking. Marcel likens Elstir to God the creator, making the world anew with each fresh masterpiece. Thus, though the women in Marcel's quest have an important role in bringing him experience - as flower maidens, temptresses, buds to be plucked before they become withered fruit - it is the men who are truly the creative forces. Indeed, as one critic points out, there are very few children in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, (25) most of the creative activity in the novel is aesthetic. We might note again Proust's use of the number three or the trinity in his artists - Bergotte the writer, Vinteuil the musician and Elstir the painter.

More than any other flowers, certainly more than the lily - the flower signifying spring in the city of the Renaissance, Venice - the hawthorn is the flower of the annunciation in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu both thematically and stylistically. Thematically, the hawthorn announces Marcel's future vocation. Stylistically, early passages

(25) Becquart, Paul : Le Prisonnier, Hommage à Proust, Librairie Gallimard, Paris, 1923, p. 134.

containing the hawthorn foreshadow the future, a fact of which the narrator makes the reader perfectly aware through his choice of details. Thus, the hawthorn passages often contain much irony. As Girard suggests A la Recherche du Temps Perdu is one of those novels which must be read twice :

It is fact that The Past Recaptured was entirely conceived, if not entirely written, before any other portion of the novel. This conclusion is, therefore, both an end and a beginning ... Each event differs in meaning according to which "end" of the novel it is observed from. There are always two perspectives which must be brought together. Ideally, therefore, the novel should be read twice, with such a double reading as Charles S. Singleton has recommended for the Divine Comedy, which is also both the record and the fruit of a spiritual metamorphosis. In the first reading, we become acquainted with the progress of the hero; in the second, we fully appreciate for the first time, (26) the viewpoint of the artist from The Past Recaptured.

We must add here that, as in life, a gain in experience, or knowledge of what is to come in the novel, can sometimes mean a loss in freshness or innocence, some of our analyses of the superficially idyllic scenes in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu may seem a little cynical to the first-time reader of Proust.

The specific passages we will study are well distributed in the text. The white hawthorns on the Combray altar appear early in Du Côté de Chez Swann, the pink hawthorns of Swann's park later in the same book, At Balbec, in Les Jeunes Filles en Fleurs, Marcel encounters a bush which has lost its hawthorns blossoms - a poignant reminder of the danger he runs of losing his vocation, and also of his horror of time

(26) Girard, René : Proust, Introduction, p. 10.

robbing of their charms 'les jeunes filles en fleurs'. The 'hawthorns of music', already introduced in the scene in Swann's park, the sonata and the septet, recur much later in La Prisonnière and offer Marcel the joy and resurrection of art, leading onwards towards the final confrontation at the Guermantes' last matinée, against the background of all the flowers of Marcel's childhood remembered. Swann, by comparison, in his almost parallel quest, has no such happy ending. His last great social gathering, a soirée rather than a matinée, is filled with images of sterility, not the least of which is the frozen hawthorn which he insists in seeing in the duchess's headdress. Yet, Swann will be the 'stem' of the flower of Marcel's quest, his novel. The metaphor is, of course, particularly apt because of Swann's early associations with the hawthorns.

The first main passage concerning the hawthorn describes the scene in the Combray church during the month of Mary. Proust's choice of setting for introducing the hawthorns reminds us, perhaps, that the last preparation for knighthood was a vigil in the church. Certainly, at this point in the novel, Marcel, like the young Jean, has many beliefs. The idealistic young Marcel tends to love anything beyond his reach, thus he loves the hawthorns for their sacred position during the month of Mary. They decorate a part of the church too holy for Marcel, a mere worshipper, to be allowed to enter, and they are inseparable from the 'sacred mysteries' which fascinate him. The entire scene, described from the viewpoint of the naive young Marcel,

(27) Orison, Geoffrey: The Englishman's Flower, London, 1958, pp. 91-2.

is extremely ironic, for the narrator deftly picks out colour symbolism and details about characters which will involve Marcel in far more down-to-earth mysteries.

Here, we must mention some of the 'mysteries', Christian and pagan, with which the hawthorn has been associated, especially as Proust had obvious knowledge of some of them, and probable knowledge of others, judging by his apt use of the hawthorn as a symbol. In the passage in the Combray church, Proust himself moves away from the modern association of the Virgin Mary with the hawthorn, to a contemplation of the underlying seasonal festival, with its erotic undertones. Thus, we too will start with the contemporary religious symbolism of the hawthorn and work backwards, ending with very strange rites indeed and with the character of Mlle Vinteuil. Many churches in France and England are decorated with sculptured hawthorn foliage; Geoffrey Grigson explains it thus : "the church made some attempt to sanctify it (May Day) and the associated fertility rites rather than to stand in opposition. Though it is denied that the foliage carved in churches and cathedrals had any symbolic content, the church-men must have known all about the Hawthorn and all it stood for in the May Day ceremonies" (27).

Before we discuss further Christian symbolism and, of course, these 'May Day ceremonies', we can show that Proust was well aware of the

(27) Grigson, Geoffrey : The Englishman's Flora, Paladin, 1958, pp. 81-2.

sculptured flowers in many cathedrals. Having read Ruskin's description of the Virgin with the hawthorns at Amiens (so much for the supposed lack of literary associations with the hawthorns), Proust decided to make a pilgrimage to see these decorations. The object of his interest was not the hawthorn itself (hence his comments about 'idolatry') nor the religion with which it is associated, but with the work of art itself. Thus, although the hawthorn was connected in Proust's own life with a 'pilgrimage', art, rather than religion, was the motivating force behind it. The journey was all the more urgent because time, showing itself to be, here, the great enemy of art, could be seen eroding the finest details of these magnificent cathedrals. From such great themes as art, religion, and time, from the contemplation of cathedrals, Proust turns, in the same collection of essays to the 'inner sanctuary' of his world - his room. Here, he likens the bed hangings and coverings to the white hawthorns obscuring an altar (28). Such a bedroom, with its mixture of the sacred and the profane, must foretell Aunt Léonie's room in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, or Proust's own room in Paris.

Nor have we finished with the Christian symbolism associated with the hawthorns. They are said to have provided the thorns for Christ's crown (29). And, in a fine mixture of pagan and Christian tradition,

(28) Proust, Marcel : Pastiches et Mélanges, Editions Gallimard, 1971, p. 164.

(29) Genders, Roy : The Scented Wild Flowers of Britain, Collins, London, 1971, pp. 99-100.

the hawthorns are credited (as in the old religions) with warding off lightning because "La Vierge Marie/ s'est endormie/ sous une aubépine/ Depuis le soir/ Jusqu'au matin" (30).

Thus we can see in traditional symbolism a sound basis for Proust's associating the hawthorns with the Virgin Mary and, thus, innocence, and with Christ's crown of thorns and, thus, martyrdom. However, as we have mentioned, the earlier, deeper symbolism of the hawthorns is pagan. The hawthorn was one of the flowers used to decorate the Maypole, focal point of what were originally fertility rites. Moreover, "In France the hawthorn and other branches of May Day were set outside the windows of very young girls. The stale, sweet scent from the trimethylamine the flowers contain, makes them suggestive of sex" (31). Now we begin to understand the underlying sexuality and vitality of the flowers, the reverence of which, according once again to Geoffrey Grigson, "is part of our French, not of our Teutonic, inheritance".

Robert Graves, however, traces the hawthorn even farther back, and, once again, the deeper we delve into Proust's imagery and the farther we progress into this first hawthorn passage in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, the more we see the aptness of these earlier beliefs in the context of Proust's work.

(30) Grigson, Geoffrey ; The Englishman's Flora, p. 183.

(31) Ibid, p. 181. Roy Genders also adds that this smell is associated with death; the flies which pollinate the flowers are drawn by the scent which reminds them of decomposing flesh (Genders, The Scented Wild Flowers of Britain, p. 100). Such an association may explain why the hawthorns are sometimes considered unlucky flowers.

the whitethorn or hawthorn or may, which takes its name from the month of May ... is, in general, an unlucky tree ... In ancient Greece, as in Britain, this was the month in which people went about in old clothes ... They also abstained from sexual intercourse - a custom which explains May as an unlucky month for marriages. In Greece and Rome, May was the month in which the temples were swept out and the images of the gods washed : the month of preparation for the midsummer festival. The Greek Goddess Maia ... took her name from 'maia', 'grandmother'; she was a malevolent beldame ... who under the name of Cardia, as has been noticed, cast spells with the hawthorn. The Greeks propitiated her at marriages - marriages being considered hateful to the Goddess, with five torches of hawthorn wood and with hawthorn blossom before the unlucky month began. (32)

Thus, the more layers of mythology we peel off the symbolism of the hawthorns, the closer we come to Mlle Vinteuil, whose lesbian tendencies must make her, too, hate the idea of marriage, and whose 'virginity', too, has an unlucky quality. (Graves, by the way, pays tribute as well to the other later 'layers' of hawthorn symbolism - the orgiastic Flora cult and the later Christian traditions of the Glastonbury thorn and the Crown of Thorns) (33). The impure qualities of 'les jeunes filles en fleurs', however, become more important in later passages. The main impression in this early passage is of a true celebration of nature.

Comme nous y rencontrions parfois M. Vinteuil, très sévère pour le "genre déplorable des jeunes gens négligés, dans les idées de l'époque actuelle", ma mère prenait garde que rien ne clochât dans ma tenue, puis on partait pour l'église. C'est au mois de Marie que je me souviens d'avoir commencé à aimer les aubépines. N'étant pas seulement dans l'église, si sainte, mais où nous avions le droit d'entrer, posées sur l'autel même, inséparables des mystères à la célébration desquels elles prenaient part, elles faisaient courir au milieu des flambeaux et des vases sacrés leurs branches attachées horizontalement les unes aux autres en un apprêt de fête, et qu'enjolivaient encore les festons de leur feuillage sur lequel étaient semés à profusion, comme sur une

(32) Graves, Robert : The White Goddess, Faber & Faber Ltd., London, mcmlii, p. 173.

(33) Ibid, p. 175.

traîne de mariée, de petits bouquets de boutons d'une blancheur éclatante. Mais, sans oser les regarder qu'à la dérobée, je sentais que ces apprêts pompeux étaient vivants et que c'était la nature elle-même qui, en creusant ces découpures dans les feuilles, en ajoutant l'ornement suprême de ces blancs boutons, avait rendu cette décoration digne de ce qui était à la fois une réjouissance populaire et une solennité mystique. Plus haut s'ouvraient leurs corolles çà et là avec une grâce insouciant, retenant si négligemment, comme un dernier et vapoureux atour, le bouquet d'étamines, fines comme les fils de la Vierge, qui les embrumait tout entières, qu'en suivant, qu'en essayant de mimer au fond de moi le geste de leur efflorescence, je l'imaginais comme si ç'avait été le mouvement de tête étourdi et rapide, au regard coquet, aux pupilles diminuées, d'une blanche jeune fille, distraite et vive. M. Vinteuil était venu avec sa fille se placer à côté de nous. D'une bonne famille, il avait été le professeur de piano des soeurs de ma grand'mère et quand, après la mort de sa femme et un héritage qu'il avait fait, il s'était retiré auprès de Combray, on le recevait souvent à la maison. Mais d'une pudibonderie excessive, il cessa de venir pour ne pas rencontrer Swann qui avait fait ce qu'il appelait "un mariage déplacé, dans le goût du jour" ... Sa seule passion était pour sa fille, et celle-ci, qui avait l'air d'un garçon, paraissait si robuste qu'on ne pouvait s'empêcher de sourire en voyant les précautions que son père prenait pour elle, ayant toujours des châles supplémentaires à lui jeter sur les épaules. Ma grand'mère faisait remarquer quelle expression douce, délicate, presque timide passait souvent dans les regards de cette enfant si rude, dont le visage était semé de taches de son. Quand elle venait de prononcer une parole, elle l'entendait avec l'esprit de ceux à qui elle l'avait dite, s'alarmait des malentendus possibles, et on voyait s'éclairer, se découper comme par transparence, sous le figure hommasse du "bon diable", les traits plus fins d'une jeune fille explorée.

Quand, au moment de quitter l'église, je m'agenouillai devant l'autel, je sentis tout d'un coup, en me relevant, s'échapper des aubépines une odeur amère et douce d'amandes, et je remarquai alors sur les fleurs de petites places plus blondes sous lesquelles je me figurai que devait être cachée cette odeur, comme, sous les parties gratinées, le goût d'une frangipane ou, sous leurs taches de rousseur, celui des joues de Mlle Vinteuil. Malgré la silencieuse immobilité des aubépines, cette intermittente odeur était comme le murmure de leur vie intense dont l'autel vibrail ainsi qu'une haie agreste visitée par de vivantes antennes, auxquelles on pensait en voyant certaines étamines presque rousses qui semblaient avoir gardé la virulence printanière, le pouvoir irritant, d'insectes aujourd'hui métamorphosés en fleurs (C. S., p. 112-114).

In these brilliant three pages, we can see Marcel moving from the contemplation of the sacred mysteries suggested by the white altar hawthorn to that of the more earthly problem of the ambiguous glances of the young girls they resemble, and, finally, to a particular enigma, that of the sometimes timid, sometimes bold, Mlle Vinteuil. Even from the beginning, there is something very pagan and sensual in the mysteries the hawthorns are celebrating, according to Marcel. The ceremonies of the month of May have Nature's blessing, and the hawthorns themselves are full of life; "je sentais que ces apprêts pompeux étaient vivants, et que c'était la nature elle-même qui ... avait rendu cette décoration (the hawthorns) digne de ce qui était à la fois une réjouissance populaire et une solennité mystique". The popular festival, of course, is a rejoicing at the return of spring and the reflowering of the earth. In this context, the worship of the Virgin Mary reminds us of an older religion, with its worship of the goddess, elements of which religion still seems to linger behind the cult of the Virgin in some countries ⁽³⁴⁾. Thus, we are not surprised when white, the colour of virginity, far from representing a retreat from earthly passions in pursuit of spiritual blessings (as with Galahad), reminds Marcel of the costume of an eager bride. A certain sexuality is also evident in Marcel's next metaphor - "en essayant de mimer au fond de moi le geste de leur efflorescence, je l'imaginai comme si ç'avait été le mouvement de tête étourdi et rapide, au regard coquet,

(34) This is one of the main themes of Geoffrey Ashe's book The Virgin, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1976. Moreover, we have already explored the association of the hawthorns with the maypole.

aux pupilles diminuées, d'une blanche jeune fille, distraite et vive" (35). Here we might notice that Marcel seems to have no difficulty in putting himself in the place of a young girl, a point we will discuss later in the light of Nadia Radovici's analysis of Marcel's true link with Mlle Vinteuil. The theme of the ambiguous coquettish glance, which M. Simons discusses so well (36), continues throughout A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. Marcel repeatedly misunderstands this gesture. Just as he feels some awe for the hawthorns placed beyond his reach on the Combray altar, so he thinks of the young girls he meets - Gilberte or the Balbec band - as being far above him.

The last paragraph of this passage further explores the colour symbolism of the hawthorns, mentioning, moreover, their scent - always an important element in Proust's flower symbolism, as we shall see. Marcel is still something of a child, a small child with a sweet tooth, so we are not surprised when he associates the scent of the hawthorns with almonds and marzipan, "une odeur amère et douce". Proust, here, shows himself a meticulous chronicler; it is just this mixture of sweetness and bitterness in the hawthorn's scent which earned it, as we have seen, its association with sex and with death (37). Such a mixture seems to fit Mlle Vinteuil, an unlucky child whose own sexual problems will hasten her father's death, an uneasy and ambiguous figure

(35) Here, 'l'efflorescence' may even refer to Marcel himself having an erection. In a later chapter, we will see that Proust used the term 'cueillir la fleur' for sexual intercourse.

(36) Simons, M. : Les Regards dans 'A la Recherche du Temps Perdu'. The French Review, xli, no. 4 (Feb. 1968), pp. 498-504.

(37) See footnote 31.

here, whose dual nature, morally bitter and sweet will be revealed in later passages. The hawthorn will be to a large extent the flower of suffering and love to Marcel. And the motif of the strong flower perfume, or of hay fever, Proust associates with lesbianism (as in the incident of Andrée, Albertine and the syringa) and homosexuality (as in the case of the Duke de Châtellerault).

The actual colour of the hawthorns, too, is not as pure as Marcel had imagined it. When he comes closer to the altar at the end of the service, Marcel notices blond or fair flecks on the hawthorn petals. It is typical that, even in the very act of genuflecting to the altar, Marcel can notice such details in the altar flowers. He likens the flecks on the petals to the freckles on Mlle Vinteuil's face. Now, "les taches de rousseur" or any facial blemish, as we shall see, nearly always points out a more basic flaw in the female Marcel is describing. In fact, very few females in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu are free from blemish - Mme Swann, Rachel, and Mme de Guermantes all have imperfect complexions which spoil the idealistic dreams of Swann or Marcel. Full of vibrant life, the hawthorns have stamens which are almost red and red, as we have seen, is the colour of earthly love. Proust's use of the words 'la rousseur' and 'roux' - here 'rousse' - instead of the more usual 'la rougeur' and 'rouge' does more than add an exact shade of colour to a description, as the former words, linked to Roussainville (a real as well as a fictional town) and to Gilberte, have an important role in Proust's personal symbolism. Then, too, the words 'blond' and 'roux' are often linked to describe a fair-

haired person. The stamens, moreover, remind Marcel of insect antennas, thus bringing to mind all the important metaphors of insect/flower pollination which Proust uses to describe homosexuality (see the orchid chapter). Even on the Virgin's altar, the hawthorns are an omen of earthly love; their perfume, their movement, their colours, their stamens all have sexual connotations in Proust's symbolism. And, as usual, sex is associated with food - hence the smell of the flowers and the sight of their flecks of colour reminding Marcel of the taste of marzipan.

We have already pointed out the way in which Marcel draws parallels between Mlle Vinteuil and the hawthorns, her freckles being analogous to the flecks on their petals. The description of the hawthorns, even earlier in the passage, merges into the first appearance of Mlle Vinteuil in the novel; "en essayant de mimer au fond de moi le geste de leur efflorescence, je l'imaginai comme si ç'avait été le mouvement de tête ... d'une blanche jeune fille, distraite et vive. M. Vinteuil était venu avec sa fille se placer à côté de nous". Thus, through the flowers and the character most closely associated with them, Proust introduces an extremely original study of the ambiguous nature of purity and virginity, compounded by the innocence and ignorance of the young Marcel, who forms an ironic foil to the experienced narrator. Perhaps we have here a modern equivalent of the ancient tradition of enforced chastity (which we have already mentioned) associated with the hawthorns. The narrator's first comment about M. Vinteuil's strict view about youthful morals is, of course, extremely ironic, as we

shall see in our discussion of the companion piece to this passage, the scene which Marcel inadvertently witnesses at Montjouvain. Marcel is involved in Vinteuil's unrealistic moral code, for his mother, who always cares a great deal for what other people think, makes sure that her son looks respectable and creates the right impression for the critical old music teacher. However, Vinteuil's attitude towards his daughter is unrealistic in more ways than one. He dotes on her to such an extent (she is "sa seule passion") that it is no wonder she later feels guilty that she cannot love him as much as she ought to in return. He coddles and protects her as though she were in precarious health, although, in actuality, she is extremely robust, strong and capable. She is indeed quite a mixture, a very ambiguous creature, probably because her father's idea of what she is or ought to be sexually and morally, being so far from the truth at least in surface things, must create real conflicts for her. Even in this early passage we see evidence of her double nature in the description of "les traits plus fins d'une jeune fille éplorée" 'sous la figure du "bon diable" ', and in her fear of being misunderstood, which, indeed, she is, as her father will insist on treating her as a frail, innocent young girl. Yet, as so often happens in Proust, Mlle Vinteuil's nature is rather like a palimpsest. On the surface, she is the innocent young maid; at a deeper level (as we shall see in the Montjouvain episode), she tries to adopt a more vicious persona to fit her sexual nature, which she considers evil. But, deeper still, she is as innocent (or naive), as 'good', as full of love for her father as ever he could wish.

Thus, the ambiguous nature of the hawthorns, their association with virginity and with the fertility of spring, their white colour and their exciting perfume, even the fact that they are part of an elaborate ritual all help to foreshadow the scene which reveals similar ambiguities in Mlle Vinteuil, who could claim the same tie of sympathy with the hawthorns as Odette feels for her orchids. Some time after Vinteuil dies, Marcel watches a strange little drama (or ritual, as he calls it) enacted between Mlle Vinteuil and her friend (now commonly known to be a lesbian). In it, Mlle Vinteuil chooses the role of "un bon diable" in a literal sense, scrupulously trying to appear as vicious as she is considered to be by Combray standards, though it is her basically good nature which prompts her as to which acts might be considered particularly 'evil', and which thus enables her to play this role. Combray, however, seems to judge only in terms of black and white. Proust, of course, is far more subtle. Hence we have the description of the church decked for worship with white flowers which remind Marcel of "une blanche jeune fille, distraite et vive" much as Mlle Vinteuil seems to be, very much a 'white mass' in contrast to the perverse 'rites', the 'sacrilege', practiced between Mlle Vinteuil and her friend the former at least dressed in mourning black after the death of her father - in other words, in Combray eyes, something of a 'black mass'. However, whilst the innocence of the white altar flowers seem to cover a deeper sexuality, the surface perversions of Mlle Vinteuil hide an inner goodness. Only certain innocents, such as Vinteuil, Marcel's mother, and Marcel's grandmother, can see beneath the surface of Mlle Vinteuil

because, although paradoxically they may care a great deal about public opinion, basically they do not judge people by narrow Combray standards according to how well they conform to Combray rituals. (When we come to discuss this point more fully, we will see a parallel with Wagner's theme of the 'pure fool').

After her father dies, Mlle Vinteuil becomes more open in her affair with her girl friend, although, since she seems to accept the Combray verdict that it was responsible for her father's death, she also seeks to mortify herself through it. Hidden behind some bushes on a hill opposite the Vinteuil's window, Marcel watches the two girls. This, indeed, is the first of various scenes (the three main ones being the episode in question, the Guermantes' courtyard scene, and the brothel scene in Paris) in which Marcel wittingly or unwittingly becomes a voyeur. As in the Guermantes' courtyard scene overlooking the encounter between Jupien and Charlus, Marcel has a superior vantage point and the image of the bush seems to presage the sexual nature of the scene he witnesses. (Later, we will discuss the image of the bush in general, but here, it surely serves to remind us a little of the hawthorns). In this episode at Montjouvain and in the Guermantes' courtyard scene, metaphors from natural history play a large part. However, whilst Proust goes out of his way to emphasize the sympathetic aspects of Charlus as an insect fertilizing Jupien as a flower, a similar indulgence does not seem to have motivated his description of the rituals between Mlle Vinteuil and her friend in terms of the stylized

courtship of birds. Since Mlle Vinteuil at least is in black, and since she and her friend seem very ungainly, ill-omened birds associated with death, such as crows, spring to mind. Heat is also a common element in the voyeur scenes, perhaps because of the possible associations with hell, but also to explain the ease with which Marcel gains such intimate glimpses of other peoples' lives. Here, the window is kept open because the weather is so hot. When Mlle Vinteuil protests that someone might see them, her friend welcomes the possibility; "quand même on nous verrait, ce n'en est que meilleur" (C. S., p. 161). For the first, but not the last, time there almost seems to be some complicity between Marcel and the people he watches.

However, although there are similarities between all the 'voyeur' scenes, the Montjouvain episode is, most of all, a companion piece to the white hawthorn scene in the Combray church. All the vocabulary Proust uses here shows us that the 'melodrama' acted out by the two girls is as much a ritual, an act of worship (though a perverted one) as any staged in the Combray church. For example, after her friend has pursued her, kissed her, and fallen on top of her on the couch, Mlle Vinteuil says, in a mannered phrase that betrays the ritual :

Oh! ce portrait de mon père qui nous regarde, je ne sais pas qui a pu le mettre là, j'ai pourtant dit vingt fois que ce n'était pas sa place.

Je me souvins que c'étaient les mots que M. Vinteuil avait dits à mon père à propos du morceau de musique. Ce portrait leur servait sans doute habituellement pour des profanations rituelles, car son amie lui répondit par ces paroles qui devaient faire partie de ses réponses liturgiques :

- Mais laisse-le donc où il est, il n'est plus là pour nous embêter. Crois-tu qu'il pleurnicherait, qu'il voudrait te mettre ton manteau, s'il te voyait là, la fenêtre ouverte, le vilain singe
(C. S., p. 162). (38)

And later Proust goes even farther into the true nature of the profanation of which Mlle Vinteuil is a living example. That it should arise from sexual ambiguities has been already foreshadowed by the 'mysteries' surrounding the hawthorns (and Mlle Vinteuil) in the Combray church. After Mlle Vinteuil's friend has threatened to spit on the photograph of her father, the narrator says :

Au moment où elle se voulait si différente de son père, ce qu'elle me rappelait, c'était les façons de penser, de dire, du vieux professeur de piano. Bien plus que sa photographie, ce qu'elle profanait ce qu'elle faisait servir à ses plaisirs mais qui restait entre eux et elle l'empêchait de les goûter directement, c'était la ressemblance de son visage, les yeux bleus de sa mère à lui qu'il lui avait transmis comme un bijou de famille, ces gestes d'amabilité qui interposaient entre le vice de Mlle Vinteuil et elle une phraséologie, une mentalité qui n'était pas faite pour lui et l'empêchait de le connaître comme quelque chose de très différent des nombreux devoirs de politesse auxquels elle se consacrait d'habitude. Ce n'est pas le mal qui lui donnait l'idée du plaisir, qui lui semblait agréable; c'est le plaisir qui lui semblait malin. Et comme, chaque fois qu'elle s'y adonnait, il s'accompagnait pour elle de ces pensées mauvaises qui le reste du temps étaient absentes de son âme vertueuse, elle finissait par trouver au plaisir quelque chose de diabolique, par l'identifier au Mal. Peut-être Mlle Vinteuil sentait-elle que son amie n'était pas foncièrement mauvaise et qu'elle n'était pas sincère au moment où elle lui tenait ces propos blasphématoires. Du moins avait-elle le plaisir d'embrasser sur son visage des sourires, des regards, feints peut-être, mais analogues dans leur expression vicieuse et basse à ceux qu'aurait eus non un être de bonté et de souffrance, mais un être de cruauté et de plaisir. Elle pouvait s'imaginer un instant qu'elle jouait vraiment les jeux qu'eût joués, avec une complice aussi dénaturée, une fille qui aurait ressenti en effet ces sentiments barbares à l'égard de la mémoire de son père. Peut-être n'eût-elle pas pensé que le mal fût un état si rare, si extraordinaire, si dépaysant, où il était si

(38) The underlining is my own.

reposant d'émigrer, si elle avait su discerner en elle, comme en tout le monde, cette indifférence aux souffrances qu'on cause et qui, quelques autres noms qu'on lui donne, est la forme terrible et permanente de la cruauté.
(C. S., p. 164, 5).

(39)

Here, then, we find that Mlle Vinteuil contains within herself a mixture of elements at least as contradictory as those symbolized by the hawthorns. Mlle Vinteuil, too, is at the same time a virginal and a sensual person; "Et à tous moments au fond d'elle-même une vierge timide et suppliante implorait et faisait reculer un soudard fruste et vainqueur" (C. S., p. 161). Most of all, Mlle Vinteuil is an unhappy balance or imbalance of male and female qualities inherited from her father and his mother :

Mais pour un homme comme M. Vinteuil il devait entrer bien plus de souffrance que pour un autre dans la résignation à une de ces situations qu'on croit à tort être l'apanage exclusif du monde de la bohème : elles se produisent chaque fois qu'a besoin de se réserver la place et la sécurité qui lui sont nécessaires un vice que la nature elle-même fait épanouir chez un enfant, parfois rien qu'en mêlant les vertus de son père et de sa mère, comme la couleur de ses yeux.
(C. S., p. 148).

This intriguing quotation, with its linking of virtues, vices, masculine and feminine qualities, and eye colour as inherited tendencies, reminds us of the ambiguous glance of Marcel's imagined hawthorn girls and, moreover, is particularly applicable to Mlle Vinteuil. For, in the main passage we are studying, Mlle Vinteuil profanes her father's memory not so much through his photograph, but through her own resemblance to him whilst she is practising the one 'vice' above all others that he abhorred. Most of all, she profanes "les yeux bleus" of

(39) The underlining is my own.

Vinteuil's own mother. Blue, along with the white of virginity, is the Virgin's colour. Thus, not for the first time, we find Proust's colour symbolism suggesting ironies or ambiguities in his characters. Indeed, witnessing the trouble Marcel finds in remembering the exact colour of his girl friends' eyes, we are not surprised that it is also difficult to pinpoint the exact 'moral shade' of various characters in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. Returning to Proust's idea that "la nature elle-même fait épanouir chez un enfant (un vice), parfois rien qu'en mêlant les vertus de son père et de sa mère", we can see that, as in the insect/flower metaphor we have mentioned in connection with Charlus and Jupien, Proust is trying once again to assume the objectivity of the natural scientist. The verb 's'épanouir', the assumption that vices and virtues are, like eye colour, inherited characteristics, all point to lesbianism being 'natural', a product of Nature, blooming like a flower in the unsuspecting child. However, when we also examine Proust's assertion that Mlle Vinteuil's vice can be the result of a 'bad mixture' of male and female virtues (Proust, presumably, means here that a woman with an excess of virtues commonly considered masculine may well become lesbian), we come to the most interesting parallel between the Combray church scene and the Montjouvain episode, based on the element of ritual, with its mixture of good and evil.

The most important contradiction in Mlle Vinteuil's nature concerns the strange combination of vice and virtue, good and evil she exhibits.

The phrase 'un bon diable' attached to her already suggests the tomboy in her, but, when we follow the religious terminology and symbolism associated with Mlle Vinteuil and her father throughout the novel, we cannot help but feel that she deserves the epithet in its literal meaning as well. In this Montjouvain scene, the ritual which she shares with her friend, the desecration of her father's portrait, is a perversion of her actual worship of her father, just as the black mass is a perversion based on the true, or white mass. If she had felt no love for her father, she would have been indifferent to his photograph; thus, even her evil has its source in good. The weekly visit to the Combray church is part of Vinteuil's own ritual; he sets the standard, and he is "très sévère pour le 'genre déplorable des jeunes gens négligés, dans les idées de l'époque actuelle' " (C. S., p. 112). He fusses over his daughter, concerned with her health and her appearance. In their own ritual at Montjouvain, Mlle Vinteuil's friend especially mocks this concern and delights in giving up appearances. But, most of all, Mlle Vinteuil and her friend transgress the moral code which sees its public expression in Combray at the Sunday services. Mlle Vinteuil desecrates the virginal part of herself, the part which Marcel associates with the worship of Mary, with the white altar hawthorns, perhaps even with the blue eyes she inherits from Vinteuil's mother. To emphasize the contrast between the two scenes, Mlle Vinteuil, as though to fit in with the 'black mass' aspect of her 'blasphemous', 'diabolical' rites, is dressed in black for her father's death. Yet, even in the church decked with white hawthorns, Marcel was fascinated

(40) The underlining is my own.

by the bitter-sweet perfume of the hawthorns which older mythologies associated with death. Certainly, there are enough people in Combray to blame Mlle Vinteuil for her father's death. If the hawthorns occupied an exalted position on the Combray altar, Mlle Vinteuil occupied a similar position in Vinteuil's life, and her fall broke his heart. However, Vinteuil's worship of his daughter, demanding of her what she cannot give, rather than her sins is the real cause of his tragedy. This will not be the last time that false beliefs are associated with the hawthorns, and Vinteuil is at least fortunate that the basic good he saw in his daughter does exist :

Mais, de ce que M. Vinteuil connaissait peut-être la conduite de sa fille, il ne s'ensuit pas que son culte pour elle en eût été diminué. Les faits ne pénètrent pas dans le monde où vivent nos croyances, ils n'ont pas fait naître celles-ci, ils ne les détruisent pas ... Mais quand M. Vinteuil songeait à sa fille et à lui-même du point de vue du monde ... alors ce jugement d'ordre social, il le portait exactement comme l'eût fait l'habitant de Combray qui lui eût été le plus hostile, il se voyait avec sa fille dans le dernier bas-fond

(40)

One other person understands the mutual adoration of father and child and blames herself for Vinteuil's death - Mlle Vinteuil's friend. Through her, we can see that Mlle Vinteuil's fall was a fortunate one; she, the person that brought Vinteuil to his lowest point, will ensure his resurrection through his works as certainly as Bergotte's books, his angels, ensured his. Marcel witnesses the final consequences of the friendship between Mlle Vinteuil and her friend when he goes to a musical afternoon at Mme Verdurin's. And here he finds that, if in the past, Mlle Vinteuil's friend has been something of a devil, now she is

(40) The underlining is my own.

doing the work of an angel, for she alone has the knowledge and talent to edit Vinteuil's Septet and insure his immortality :

l'approximation la plus hardie des allégresses de l'au-delà se fût justement matérialisée dans le triste petit bourgeois bienséant que nous rencontrions au mois de Marie à Combray! Mais, surtout, comment se faisait-il que cette révélation, la plus étrange que j'eusse reçue, d'un type inconnu de joie, j'eusse pu la recevoir de lui, puisque, disait-on, quand il était mort il n'avait laissé que sa Sonate, que le reste demeurait inexistant en d'indéchiffrables notations? Indéchiffrables, mais qui pourtant avaient fini à force de patience, d'intelligence et de respect, par être déchiffrées par la seule personne qui avait assez vécu auprès de Vinteuil pour bien connaître sa manière de travailler, pour deviner ses indications d'orchestre : l'amie de Mlle Vinteuil. Du vivant même du grand musicien, elle avait appris de la fille le culte que celle-ci avait pour son père. C'est à cause de ce culte que, dans ces moments où l'on va à l'opposé de ses inclinations véritables, les deux jeunes filles avaient pu trouver un plaisir dément aux profanations qui ont été racontées. (L'adoration pour son père était la condition même du sacrilège de sa fille; et sans doute, la volupté de ce sacrilège, elles eussent dû se la refuser, mais celle-ci ne les exprimait pas tout entières). Et d'ailleurs, elles étaient allées se raréfiant, jusqu'à disparaître tout à fait, au fur et à mesure que ces relations charnelles et malades, ce trouble et fumeux embrasement avait fait place à la flamme d'une amitié haute et pure. L'amie de Mlle Vinteuil était quelquefois traversée par l'importune pensée qu'elle avait peut-être précipité la mort de Vinteuil. Du moins, en passant des années à débrouiller le grimoire laissé par Vinteuil, en établissant la lecture certaine de ces hiéroglyphes inconnus, l'amie de Mlle Vinteuil eut la consolation d'assurer au musicien dont elle avait assombri les dernières années une gloire immortelle et compensatrice (P., p. 261,2). (41)

So many ironies are pointed out in this passage. The sad little bourgeois, M. Vinteuil, produces a work of great joy. Despite the unimaginative fussiness he showed in the church services in the month of Mary, he has somehow created music that seems to surpass the music of this world. And, of course, Mlle Vinteuil was right in believing

(41) The underlining is my own.

her friend to be not wholly evil, as her father was right in his judgement of the friend's musical talents. Good has come of evil, for the friend was ultimately more susceptible to Mlle Vinteuil's worship of her father than to her perversion of it. Her guilt over Vinteuil's death urges her to give him immortal glory. From the darkest part of Vinteuil's life has come the greatest light, the joyous peal of midday bells, reminiscent of those Marcel used to hear in the village square at Combray. And, since these were the bells of the same church where Marcel's family used to worship during the month of May, we have come full circle back to the scene of the hawthorns on the altar.

Nor have we left behind entirely the theme of the quest, especially as Proust had heard it expressed in Wagner's Parsifal. In Parsifal, the hero is kept from the world by his mother. One of the first acts he commits in the play, killing one of the grail swans, shows his ignorance of the grail rituals and earns him the name of fool, 'Parsifal' meaning 'pure fool'. This innocence, however, is the quality which enables Parsifal to break the evil enchantments of Klingsor. When Kundry, under Klingsor's power, attempts to seduce Parsifal, she must refer to the only kiss that Parsifal has experienced, his mother's. The memory of the purity of mother love thus protects Parsifal from evil, a theme which must have appealed to Proust. In A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, we can see the freshness of vision evident in those who (whilst abiding by public opinion) do not necessarily judge people

by the usual Combray criteria. For their unusual ideas, such people as Marcel's grandmother and even Vinteuil himself, are considered fools, whilst Marcel's mother, who shares the same 'innocence', considers herself less intelligent than her more orthodox husband. These three characters, then, are the only ones to recognize the good in Mlle Vinteuil. Marcel's grandmother, who sees nothing wrong in a man having feminine virtues, and thus praises Charlus, is not put off by Mlle Vinteuil's masculinity, and draws attention to the delicate, timid expression on her face, an expression which is even evident later in the Montjouvain scene. M. Vinteuil, too, is finally justified in his opinion that Mlle Vinteuil's friend is "une femme supérieure, un grand coeur ... elle aurait eu des dispositions extraordinaires pour la musique si elle les avait cultivées" (C. S., p. 147). And, of course, he never loses faith in his daughter. But it is Marcel's mother who has the best understanding of Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, though it comes from her experience as a mother rather than from her intelligence (which she probably under-rates anyway). Thus, the theme of the 'pure fool' merges into the theme of mother love in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu as in Parsifal :

Elle (Mlle Vinteuil) était en grand deuil, car son père était mort depuis peu. Nous n'étions pas allés la voir, ma mère ne l'avait pas voulu à cause d'une vertu qui chez elle limitait seule les effets de la bonté : la pudeur; mais elle la plaignait profondément. Ma mère se rappelait la triste fin de vie de M. Vinteuil, tout absorbée d'abord par les soins de mère et de bonne d'enfant qu'il donnait à sa fille, puis par les souffrances que celle-ci lui avait causées ... elle savait qu'il avait renoncé à jamais à achever de transcrire au net toute son oeuvre des dernières années ... ma mère pensait à cet autre renoncement plus cruel, encore auquel M. Vinteuil avait été contraint,

le renoncement à un avenir de bonheur honnête et respecté pour sa fille ... elle éprouvait un véritable chagrin et songeait avec effroi à celui, autrement amer, que devait éprouver Mlle Vinteuil, tout mêlé du remords d'avoir à peu près tué son père. "Pauvre M. Vinteuil, disait ma mère, il a vécu et il est mort pour sa fille, sans avoir reçu son salaire. Le recevra-t-il après sa mort et sous quelle forme? Il ne pourrait lui venir que d'elle."

(C. S., p. 159, 60).

(42)

This passage is interesting on a number of counts. Just as we have seen 'evil' turned to good in the friendship between Mlle Vinteuil and her musician friend, so in the ambiguous moral climate introduced by the hawthorns, we find, here, a virtue which stifles kindness. In fact, 'la pudeur' is a quality closely related to innocence and purity, yet here, unlike in Wagner's Parsifal, it has a negative function, curbing Marcel's mother's better nature. We have already mentioned the sweetness that Marcel's grandmother saw in Mlle Vinteuil's expression after the church service. Here, Marcel's mother comments on the bitterness she must feel over her father's death. Hence Mlle Vinteuil's life seems to share the bitter-sweet quality of the hawthorn scent. Yet there is more 'sweetness' to come, for, as we have seen the episode at Montjouvain is not Vinteuil's last reward from his daughter. Although Marcel's mother may be pessimistic, her use of the phrase 'son salaire', with its biblical ring, fits in well with the religious symbolism that Proust uses in the Combray church scene and the Montjouvain one. We might add here that Proust was so interested in the etymology of place names that he sometimes seemed to infer meanings in his fictional place names. Thus, at an early point in the book,

(42) The underlining is my own.

Vinteuil's reward seems an unhappy one indeed, and the name 'Montjouvain' seems to suggest that he has played his piano in vain (*jouer en vain*). At the party where Marcel hears the final version of his Septet, as transcribed by Mlle Vinteuil's friend, he knows that he is listening to Vinteuil's true reward, his finished work, "*le seul bain de Jouvence*" (P., p. 258), a phrase surely slightly reminiscent of 'Montjouvain'.

Perhaps the most important point in this passage however, is the way in which Marcel's mother seems to identify with M. Vinteuil, or, at least, to see him as a mother figure. They share the same prudishness and the same worry about their offspring. Nor does the parallel stop with the mention of the similarities between the two fictional parents and their children. As we shall see, Proust and his mother may have provided some of the material for Mlle Vinteuil and her father. Certainly, Proust published little or nothing on the subject of homosexuality or lesbianism whilst his mother lived. She, like M. Vinteuil with his daughter, could be said to have acted the part of the unofficial censor in her son's life. It was a role he allowed no-one else to take over after her death, not even Francis Jammes, a poet whose criticism Proust valued. When Jammes suggested that he ought to suppress the Montjouvain episode, Proust championed it as a very important part of the pattern of his novel. "*Mais j'ai si soigneusement bâti cet ouvrage que cet épisode du premier volume est l'explication de la jalousie de mon jeune héros dans les quatrième et*

cinquième volumes" ⁽⁴³⁾. However, one censor did remain. The criticism made a profound impression on Proust, because Jammes' name recurs in a dream Proust recounts in his novel (S. G., p. 762), a dream whose importance we cannot deny after reading Lilian Fearn's persuasive article on the subject ⁽⁴⁴⁾. His subconscious was not Proust's only inhibitor, for he seems to have been motivated to a certain extent by that quality of 'modesty' which he ascribed to the fictional Marcel's mother. Thus, in a letter to Mme Finally, he tells her that he is sending a copy of his book to her brother, but not to her; "à cause de l'extrême indécence de certaines parties je n'ai pas osé l'envoyer à dames" ⁽⁴⁵⁾.

By now, we can see that the Montjouvain episode is important not only structurally as the scene which continues the themes introduced in the first hawthorn passage, and as a link with further scenes concerning Marcel's jealousy over Albertine, one of "les jeunes filles en fleurs", but as a source of insights into the sympathy of Marcel and his creator for the plight of Mlle Vinteuil. In fact, Marcel and his mother both point out similarities between themselves and Mlle Vinteuil and her father. We have already mentioned various parallels between Marcel's mother and Vinteuil (their strictness, their task of mothering). And Marcel, too, can feel within himself the coquettishness of the hawthorn flowers. He, too, is rather sexually ambiguous, too

(43) Fearn, Liliane : Sur un Rêve de Marcel, Bulletin no. 17, 1967, p. 544.

(44) Ibid.

(45) Proust, Marcel : Lettre à Mme Finally, Bulletin no. 22, 1972, p. 1281.

frail for heavy sports, "trop beau pour un garçon" (C. S., p. 414). Most of all, overwhelmed by a sense of guilt as strong as that which his mother sees in Mlle Vinteuil, Marcel comes to believe that he is somehow responsible for the death of his mother and grandmother (a feeling he shares with Wagner's Parsifal). The parallels are even stronger, of course, for Proust himself. Painter tells us that Proust would present photos of various lady friends and even of his mother to be 'profaned' by whomever he chose for the task.

the primal scene at Montjouvain, where Mlle Vinteuil induces her friend to insult her father's portrait was thus repeated in his own life by Proust. It is true, however, of Proust as of Mlle Vinteuil (who dedicates her life equally to her vice and to the memory of her dead parent), that this atrocious deed was a symptom not only of hatred, but of wounded, lifelong love. (46)

Apart from illustrating Proust's courage in treating an episode from his own life, Painter's quotation makes us look at this act of 'profanation' from a slightly different point of view. The fact that the 'sacrilege' was originally against Proust's mother gives the Montjouvain scene even more overtones of a black mass against the white virgin mother. And, especially when we juxtapose it with two quotations from the text, Painter's statement gives us a much clearer understanding of Proust's concept of "profanation". "Bien plus que sa photographie", says the narrator of Mlle Vinteuil and her father's photograph, "ce qu'elle profanait, ce qu'elle faisait servir à ses plaisirs mais qui restait entre eux et elle et l'empêchait de les goûter directement,

(46) Painter, George D. : Marcel Proust, Vol. 11, Chatto & Windus, London, 1965, p. 268.

c'était la ressemblance de son visage, les yeux bleus de sa mère à lui qu'il lui avait transmis" (C. S., p. 164). Later, in talking of Charlus, who is homosexual, the narrator hazards the opinion that "les fils n'ayant pas toujours la ressemblance paternelle, même sans être invertis ... consomment dans leur visage la profanation de leur mère" (S. G., p. 908). Thus, taking the comment that such sons are not necessarily homosexuals with a pinch of salt, we can see that Proust really has such a son in mind when he talks of Mlle Vinteuil, or, at least, they share the same 'profanation', that of resembling too closely the parent of the opposite sex.

The similarity between Mlle Vinteuil and Marcel or Mlle Vinteuil and Proust has not escaped the critics. Cattau comments that Proust's characters are often types and that "chaque type est le double de l'auteur" ⁽⁴⁷⁾, a backhanded compliment to the complexity of Proust's personality. He also comments, referring to Proust and Mlle Vinteuil, on "cet accouplement que formait en son âme le vice avec la pureté, comme s'il y eût en lui 'l'union d'un soldat brutal et d'une innocente jeune fille' " ⁽⁴⁸⁾. Deleuze remarks that Proust emphasizes the importance of the mother to men and father to women, as, perhaps, a psychological theory on his part of the origin of homosexuality ⁽⁴⁹⁾.

(47) Cattau, Georges : Marcel Proust, Editions Universitaires, Paris, 1958, p. 21.

(48) Ibid, p. 30.

(49) Deleuze, Gilles : Marcel Proust et les Signes, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1964, p. 59.

Most observant of all, Nadia Radovici comments :

A cette troisième lecture, l'attention mise en éveil par tous les détails que je connaissais de la vie de l'auteur, j'ai observé un étrange parallélisme entre la jeune fille robuste et gaie comme un garçon, élevée par un père qui l'adorait - et le garçon sensible et délicat élevé avec un excès de soins par une mère trop aimée; - entre la jeune fille consciente d'être "habitée" par un garçon dont elle avait sans le vouloir la voix et les manières rudes, dont elle rougissait quand elle s'en rendait compte, adoptant sur le coup le regard et la voix éplorés (50) "de la jeune fille qu'elle aurait voulu être."

Thus, the mystery of Mlle Vinteuil, introduced by the white hawthorns, is also to some extent the mystery of Marcel, and even of Proust. The fact that Nadia Radovici had to read A la Recherche du Temps Perdu three times before Proust's clues fell into place brings us back to our original point about the annunciatory role of the hawthorns, or, at least, the hawthorn passages. Flowers of mystery and annunciation, they are also flowers of a very strange and uneasy virginity which we can see in Marcel and Mlle Vinteuil, both restrained by their parents, who exhibit a rather narrow innocence. Marcel, in particular, worships the maternal and the chaste, best represented by his mother at this point. However, perhaps because he is aware of all the frustration behind his own enforced virginity, or perhaps because of this sensual need for profanation which he shares with Mlle Vinteuil, the image of a nun (C. G., p. 386) or a young maiden of the Middle Ages (C. G., p. 393) retains a great sexual allure for Marcel throughout his life. The next hawthorn passage, however, moves from white to red, and offers Marcel his first true initiation into love, in a setting full of the

(50) Radovici, Nadia : La Vraie Personnalité de Mlle Vinteuil, Bulletin no. 23, 1973, p. 1687.

vitality of nature and heavy with omens of his future travels, actual as well as spiritual.

Germaine Brée's comments on the importance of mythology in Proust's works and the way in which the focus of mythological significance changes as the child matures are particularly applicable to the pink hawthorn passage, in which the child has still far to go to catch up with the experienced viewpoint of the narrator. As we may remember, Germaine Brée delineates three important stages in Proust's characters' development; the first at which the child deifies human beings, the second during which he becomes disillusioned and demotes them to human status, and the third, in which the new gods are the inner forces that move man (51).

In the pink hawthorn passage, we find a confrontation of the first and last stages, illustrated in the young Marcel and the mature narrator respectively. The former is obviously still ready to worship the adults around him as the concluding comment of the entire scene shows :

Ma tante n'allait pas voir la haie d'épines roses, mais à tous moments je demandais à mes parents si elle n'irait pas, si autrefois elle allait souvent à Tansonville, tâchant de les faire parler des parents et grand-parents de Mlle Swann qui me semblaient grands comme les dieux. Ce nom, devenu pour moi presque mythologique, de Swann, quand je causais avec mes parents, je languissais du besoin de leur entendre dire, je n'osais pas le prononcer moi-même
(C. S., p. 144).

Now, the naive young Marcel believes in the mythological dramas he

(51) Brée, Germaine : Proust's Dormant Gods, p. 190.

builds around himself and others; the mature narrator, on the other hand, consciously chooses themes and symbols from mythology to illustrate the psychology of the characters in the novel, and, most of all, to illustrate the progression of his young artist's quest. Both, then, show us the truth in Germaine Brée's theory. Moreover, the two viewpoints, as we have remarked, are particularly harmonious in the pink hawthorn passage. Marcel sees the park as Swann's kingdom - a realm he is not allowed to visit (he thinks) because he is not worthy of mingling with such almost godlike people. The narrator makes it perfectly clear that Swann's park is out of bounds because of Swann's unfortunate marriage to a courtesan. Thus, it is just the sort of garden where one might expect Marcel to be offered forbidden fruit, and true to the story of Genesis, the godlike father is absent from the garden when Gilberte tries to tempt Marcel. Marcel's insistence on the almost magical association of the hawthorns with life, in that Aunt Léonie really gives up life when she can no longer go and see the hawthorns and when she refuses to receive the visits of Swann, to whom the hawthorns belong, brings us back to the Fisher King legend (the whole passage is full of symbols from this quest legend). But, once again, the fact that Swann is absent from his garden reminds us of the way in which he gave up seeing Tansonville for Odette. The sterility which ensued did not touch the garden, as in the original legend, but infected instead Swann's own life. Thus, we can say that the mature artist, or narrator has found in the mythological implications, the pattern of his novel's symbols that which eluded Marcel in his first

confrontation with the hawthorns - a framework which would enable the observer to understand the true meaning of the flowers. For, understanding the hawthorns as little as he understands Gilberte's gesture ⁽⁵²⁾, Marcel is confused by the flowers; "mais j'avais beau me faire un écran de mes mains pour n'avoir qu'elles sous les yeux, le sentiment qu'elles éveillaient en moi restait obscur et vague" (C. S., p. 139).

Marcel's family have avoided Swann ever since his 'unfortunate' marriage to Odette. Thus, Marcel's father and grandfather elect to walk past Swann's park solely because they know he is away on a visit, a fact which deprives the walk of all its magic for Marcel. The lilacs are past their bloom, leaving "une écume creuse, sèche et sans parfums" (C. S., p. 136). Nonetheless, Swann's park is a kingdom, a natural empire, marked by the sceptre of the gladioli and the lilies around his pond.

certaines lieux font toujours régner autour d'eux leur empire particulier, arborent leurs insignes immémoriaux au milieu d'un parc comme ils auraient fait loin de toute intervention humaine ... C'est ainsi qu'au pied de l'allée qui dominait l'étang artificiel, s'était composée sur deux rangs, tressés de fleurs de myosotis et de pervenches, la couronne naturelle, délicate et bleue qui ceint le front clair-obscur des eaux, et que le glaïeul laissant fléchir ses glaives avec un abandon royal, étendait sur l'eupatoire et la grenouillette au pied mouillé les fleurs de lis en lambeaux, violettes et jaunes, de son sceptre lacustre. (C. S., p. 136, 137).

(52) This gesture is probably the one which le Nouveau Larousse Illustré refers to as "la cigogne" - which word, again returns us to bird imagery - but very ironic bird imagery when we consider all the poetic associations with Gilberte's last name, "Swann".

Thus, Proust establishes the theme of the garden as a kingdom and, we shall see, one that is not easily accessible to Marcel. It is interesting to note that, whilst Marcel is not allowed to visit Tansonville by his parents, Vinteuil, after his daughter's disgrace is commonly known, is overjoyed to receive an invitation from Swann for her to visit the park and Gilberte. Before his daughter ruined her reputation, Vinteuil would have been insulted by this invitation, as he was one of the first to condemn Swann, but now he feels himself on an even lower level, and is too ashamed to let Mlle Vinteuil visit the park.

Swann, as Fowlie rightly points out ⁽⁵³⁾, resembles the Fisher King and therefore deserves to live in a park kingdom especially with the pond created by his parents. We have already mentioned some parallels between Swann and the legendary Fisher King and others will become evident in our conclusion - the way in which Swann deserts his kingdom for Odette, who gives him, through her coldness, "*sa secrète blessure*" (C. S., p. 321), and the way in which his own life becomes an arid wasteland (C. S., p. 304, 308) for example. Yet the pond (an artificial, not a natural one) provides us with the most important link between Swann and the Fisher King, as someone is fishing (in more than one sense) when Marcel visits Tansonville, and he is fascinated by the sight of the bobbing line. However, just as the pond is an artificial one,

(53) Fowlie, Wallace : A Reading of Proust, p. 276.

Gilberte's fishing, too, seems artificial; as we shall see, she is interested in a bigger catch than the pond can offer.

Proust introduces this symbol of fishing in the passage which builds up the suspense leading to the appearance of the pink hawthorns. In Proust's own symbolism, fishing, fishermen or fisher girls represent an element of strangeness or mystery, even in complacent Combray, as the following two quotations show. Proust humorously recounts Aunt Léonie's excitement and dismay at discovering a possible stranger in Combray and her request that Françoise find out the person's identity :

Mais ma tante savait bien que ce n'était pas pour rien qu'elle avait sonné Françoise, car, à Combray, une personne "qu'on ne connaissait point" était un être aussi peu croyable qu'un dieu de la mythologie, et de fait on ne se souvenait pas que, chaque fois que s'était produite, dans la rue du Saint-Esprit ou sur la place, une de ces apparitions stupéfiantes, des recherches bien conduites n'eussent pas fini par réduire le personnage fabuleux aux proportions d'une "personne qu'on connaissait". (C. S., p. 57).

Thus, it is interesting when Marcel notes : "A Combray où je savais quelle individualité de maréchal ferrant ou de garçon épicier était dissimulée sous l'uniforme de suisse ou le surplis de l'enfant de chœur, ce pêcheur (whom he habitually sees on walks by the Vivonne) est la seule personne dont je n'aie jamais découvert l'identité" (C. S., p. 167). If this comment seems solely a humorous aside, we will see later in this chapter the attraction that Marcel feels for the young fishing girls at Balbec, largely because of their enigmatic air of guarding a secret life in their eyes. Moreover, Marcel prefers girls to embody the natural scene in which he finds them, and thus the fisher girls stand

for all the mystery, the tidal flux yet essential timelessness of the sea. Then, too, the only other unanswered question in Combray, apart from the identity of the fisherman, is the exact location of the source of the river in which he fishes. Marcel shall solve this mystery at the same time as he discovers the exact meaning of the role Gilberte plays in the pink hawthorn passage. As we shall see, Gilberte, too, is a fisher girl, in all senses of the image.

In the traditional myths, the fish, of course, is a most important symbol. Jessie Weston insists on its primary role in ancient religions, in creation myths and in fertility rites ⁽⁵⁴⁾; it is a basic symbol in this context in the Fisher King myth, which deals with the theme of returning the fertility to the land. Jessie Weston also mentions a Celtic myth in which the hero gains knowledge on eating a magic fish ⁽⁵⁵⁾, with much better consequences than Adam and Eve ever suffered from their feast. This particular allusion really belongs, however, as we shall see, to our discussion of the red and violet flower imagery in Proust's work. Marcel's encounter with Gilberte and the pink hawthorns is none the less part of Proust's own personal myth of knowledge. We might add that, in some French versions of the myth, one can find a play on words in the term "le Roi Pêcheur" - the sinner king as well as the fisher king ⁽⁵⁶⁾. Swann fits both senses of the title; his sin is marrying Odette, at least in Combray eyes, and it bars him

(54) Weston, Jessie : From Ritual to Romance, pp. 116, 125-130.

(55) Ibid, p. 130.

(56) Bulfinch, Thomas : The Age of Chivalry and Legends of Charlemagne, the New American Library, New York, 1962, p. 158.

from joining in the rituals of the community just as effectively as did the first king's sin. Then, too, Marcel sees evidence of someone fishing at Tansonville, just as Perceval encountered fishermen on the lake before the Fisher King's domain. The following strange passage is full of half-hidden meaning - wholly hidden to the young Marcel - and forms a particularly suitable introduction to Swann's forbidden garden :

Le départ de Mlle Swann qui - en m'ôtant la chance terrible de la voir apparaître dans une allée, d'être connu et méprisé par la petite fille privilégiée qui avait Bergotte pour ami et allait avec lui visiter des cathédrales - me rendait la contemplation de Tansonville indifférente la première fois où elle m'était permise, semblait au contraire ajouter à cette propriété, aux yeux de mon grand-père et de mon père, des commodités, un agrément passager ... j'aurais voulu que leurs calculs fussent déjoués, qu'un miracle fût apparaître Mlle Swann avec son père, si près de nous que nous n'aurions pas le temps de l'éviter et serions obligés de faire sa connaissance. Aussi, quand tout d'un coup j'aperçus sur l'herbe, comme un signe de sa présence possible, un couffin oublié à côté d'une ligne dont le bouchon flottait sur l'eau, je m'empressai de détourner d'un autre côté les regards de mon père et de mon grand-père. D'ailleurs, Swann nous ayant dit que c'était mal à lui de s'absenter, car il avait pour le moment de la famille à demeure, la ligne pouvait appartenir à quelque invité. On n'entendait aucun bruit de pas dans les allées. Divisant la hauteur d'un arbre incertain, un invisible oiseau s'ingéniait à faire trouver la journée courte, explorait d'une note prolongée la solitude environnante, mais il recevait d'elle une réplique si unanime, un choc en retour si redoublé de silence et d'immobilité qu'on aurait dit qu'il venait d'arrêter pour toujours l'instant qu'il avait cherché à faire passer plus vite. La lumière tombait si implacable du ciel devenu fixe que l'on aurait voulu se soustraire à son attention, et l'eau dormante elle-même, dont des insectes irritaient perpétuellement le sommeil, rêvant sans doute de quelque Maelstrom imaginaire, augmentait le trouble où m'avait jeté la vue du flotteur de liège en semblant l'entraîner à toute vitesse sur les étendues silencieuses du ciel reflété; presque vertical il paraissait prêt à plonger et déjà je me demandais si, sans tenir compte du désir et de la crainte que j'avais de la connaître, je n'avais pas le devoir de faire prévenir Mlle Swann que le poisson mordait.

(C. S., p. 137).

(57)

(57) The underlining is my own.

This whole passage is worth quoting for the suspense it creates, for the impression it evokes of stillness, Time arrested, before an event which will divide Marcel's life into 'time before Gilberte' and 'time after Gilberte'. Right from the beginning, Marcel expresses a mixture of desire and fear deriving from the self-depreciation of the worshipper which will mark his approach to love in the future. He has always thought that he is not allowed to meet Gilberte because he is beneath such an important friend of Bergotte, although, as we have seen, Combray opinion puts him in a sphere of respectability where she cannot hope to follow. Marcel is prepared to worship her with her scorn as his only reward; in fact, he seems to fear that "être connu" will automatically mean "être méprisé". A similar fear, no doubt, keeps him from ever letting any of his girl-friends know him well. With the exaggeration of 'sa croyante jeunesse', Marcel believes that only a miracle could make Gilberte appear. Actually, his daydream succeeds beyond his wildest expectations, for she actually falls for him. If we are to believe the symbol of the fishing line on a humorous level, in the light of Gilberte's later obscene gesture, she has her hook out for any presentable young boy and Marcel himself is nibbling at the bait (58). Of course, there is a serious level to the pond and fishing symbolism too. We have seen how often Proust uses a whole landscape to describe a frame of mind or illustrate a stage of development in his hero. His Allégorie, for example, with its extended metaphor of

(58) Viers, Rina : La Signification des Fleurs dans l'Oeuvre de Marcel Proust, p. 157.

the meadow which becomes a lake, traces a crisis in the writer's life. In the passage from A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, the suspense created by the bird's song (is Proust here remembering the bird motif in Wagner's Siegfried which occurs just before Siegfried meets the dragon?), the surrounding hush, the solitude, makes one feel that Marcel's whole world is waiting for something irrevocable to happen - as it does when Marcel encounters the pink hawthorn and Gilberte, the rosy young girl. The description of the pond's still water, with its troubled depths and its surface irritated by insects, with its dream of a Maelstrom to come, coincides exactly with Marcel's own stage of development. At this point in his life, Marcel dreams of meeting passionate and generous girls in his walks around Combray, but, in reality, he has no experience even of friendship with girls. The irritating insects on the surface and the Maelstrom which may disturb the depths are both images of sexual awakening. We have already seen Proust liken the hawthorns on the Combray altar to insects just recently metamorphosed into flowers, but somehow retaining in their red antenna - or stamens - all the vitality of life awakening in the spring. Then, in the chapter on the tilleul or lime blossoms, we discussed Proust's use of the word "le tourbillon" to describe the confusion accompanying the moment of awakening from sleep, or just preceding the vision he finds evoked by his cup of tea. The future confusion, or whirlpool of feelings may refer to the meeting with Gilberte; certainly Proust uses the word "le tourbillon" to describe Marcel's frame of mind when he meets "les jeunes filles en fleurs" (J. F., p. 797) and when he tries

to kiss Albertine for the first time (J. F., p. 934). Actually, this description of the pond or lake in Swann's park emphasizes Proust's fondness for water as the mirror of the self - the meadow-lake in Allégorie, this pond, even the cup of tea are narcissistic images, magic implements which allow the writer to see aspects of his own life reflected in them. We shall find, too, that Marcel is mirrored in various characters in the novel (especially feminine ones, as in the episode in which Marcel, looking in the mirror, notices his resemblance to Andrée) though he himself does not always realize it.

Marcel, then, has caught the suspense in the air. His curiosity is aroused and he half feels "le devoir de faire prévenir Mlle Swann que le poisson mordait" (C. S., p. 137). (At this point, and of course, later in the incident of Gilberte's obscene gesture, we wonder if Marcel, here, is the fish). The scene is therefore set for a confrontation which is important on at least three levels. The pink hawthorns will, by their colour, intensify the feeling that Marcel is witnessing a festival in nature. The glimpse of Gilberte emphasizes the sexual nature of this festival and the possibility of suffering through love which is already implied in the thorn is repeated in the blood-tinge of the flower - the red of experience rather than the white of virginity. But, even more than an incipient lover, Marcel is a future artist. We have already mentioned in the introduction Proust's broad definition of metaphor, which allows its existence not only in literature but also in

painting. Here, the white and pink hawthorns form a metaphor in nature, and also presage two works of music by Vinteuil, his youthful 'white' sonata and his mature 'red' septet. This artistic level of symbolism concerning the hawthorns is perhaps the most important, however the Tansonville passage emphasizes, as much as anything, the long road before reaching "le seul véritable voyage" which Vinteuil's septet offers Marcel - "d'avoir d'autres yeux, de voir l'univers avec les yeux d'un autre" (P., p. 258). We may even see this aesthetic experience in Marcel's future, this seeing the world through another's eyes, as the conclusion of the theme of the ambiguous glance associated with the hawthorns and with Marcel's attempts to understand what goes on behind the eyes of the women he loves, and thus to capture or possess their lives. The ambition proves to be an impossibility through love, but not through art.

Before seeing the pink hawthorns, Marcel must walk past a hedge of white hawthorns which take him back to the Combray church and a youthful mixture of idealism and sensuality. For once, Marcel is dissatisfied with these beautiful flowers, because, without the perspective that the pink hawthorns and, by symbolic implication that experience will bring him he cannot fully understand their meaning or place them in a suitable framework (the emphasis on comparisons with works of art in the following passages must remind us once again that A la Recherche du Temps Perdu is the chronicle of an artistic apprenticeship).

il me fallut rejoindre en courant mon père et mon grand-père qui m'appelaient, étonnés que je ne les eusse pas suivis dans le petit chemin qui monte vers les champs et où ils s'étaient engagés. Je le trouvai tout bourdonnant de l'odeur des aubépines. La haie formait comme une suite de chapelles qui disparaissaient sous la jonchée de leurs fleurs amoncelées en reposoir; au-dessous d'elles, le soleil posait à terre un quadrillage de clarté, comme s'il venait de traverser une verrière; leur parfum s'étendait aussi onctueux, aussi délimité en sa forme que si j'eusse été devant l'autel de la Vierge, et les fleurs, aussi parées, tenaient chacune d'un air distrait son étincelant bouquet d'étamines, fines et rayonnantes nervures de style flamboyant comme celles qui à l'église ajouraient la rampe du jubé ou les meneaux du vitrail et qui s'épanouissaient en blanche chair de fleur de fraisier ...

Mais j'avais beau rester devant les aubépines à respirer, à porter devant ma pensée qui ne savait ce qu'elle devait en faire, à perdre, à retrouver leur invisible et fixe odeur, à m'unir au rythme qui jetait leurs fleurs, ici et là, avec une allégresse juvénile et à des intervalles inattendus comme certains intervalles musicaux, elles m'offraient indéfiniment le même charme avec une profusion inépuisable, mais sans me laisser approfondir davantage, comme ces mélodies qu'on rejoue cent fois de suite sans descendre plus avant dans leur secret. Je me détournais d'elles un moment, pour les aborder ensuite avec des forces plus fraîches ... la vue d'un seul coquelicot hissant au bout de son cordage et faisant cingler au vent sa flamme rouge, au-dessus de sa bouée graisseuse et noire, me faisait battre le coeur, comme au voyageur qui aperçoit sur une terre basse une première barque échouée que répare un calfat, et s'écrie, avant de l'avoir encore vue : "La Mer!" (59) (C. S., p. 138, 139).

Here, the theme of the voyage seems as important as that of art - although the voyage must be a symbolic as well as an actual one, and its object is to give Marcel the freshness he needs to understand the flowers. The passage starts with a long simile comparing the hawthorn hedge with a series of chapels which reminds Marcel, of course, of the Combray church and the altar of the Virgin. The emphasis here, in their natural setting, is more than ever on the vitality and sexuality of the

(59) The underlining is my own.

flowers. Once again we meet a certain ambiguity; the adjective 'distrain' is one of those which Proust used to describe the type of young girl the hawthorns evoke, whilst the bouquet of stamens is an obvious masculine detail. Proust also adds the sensual image of the fleshy whiteness of the strawberry plants. We have come to expect the association of food and love or sex, but the mention of the white strawberry flowers is particularly apt, as their fruit is red (as Proust will emphasize when he introduces the red-tinged hawthorns), and so they act, perhaps, as a reminder that Marcel is moving away from Mlle Vinteuil's uneasy virginity and towards the red-haired, rosy-cheeked Gilberte, who is quite ready for picking.

In any case, Marcel himself realizes that these flowers, with their youthful rhythm, which he can so easily copy in himself, are somehow eluding him. He feels in his words, "j'avais beau rester devant les aubépines à respirer ... à perdre, à retrouver leur invisible et fixe odeur" (C. S., p. 138). Later, we will find that the perfume of a flower and "la petite phrase" (C. S., p. 348) of Vinteuil's sonata both can evoke the essence of a certain moment in time. Moreover, Marcel's faith in art is very much bound up with Vinteuil's works, the more mature of which has the power, which the earlier sonata lacks, to restore this faith. Thus, to lose the hawthorns or their perfume has a symbolic significance for Marcel. The theme of losing and regaining is a common biblical one - the lost lamb, the prodigal son, the losing of one's self to regain the kingdom of heaven - but, of course, it is

also one of the most important Proustian themes, incorporated, as it is, in the very title of the novel. Moreover, as far as the actual flowers go, Marcel does lose them or, at least, loses sight of them when he goes to Balbec. This voyage, however, is necessary to Marcel in order to give him the freshness of outlook and the renewal of strength which comes from experience.

In this passage, we become aware that the hawthorns are part of a hedge, a hedge which emphasizes the fact that, in Combray, one's moral position can be judged by exclusion or inclusion at Tansonville. The poppy, on the other hand, the emblem of the voyage, belongs to "l'immense étendue où déferlent les blés" (C. S., p. 138), a stretch of open country which reminds Marcel of the freedom and expanse of the sea. The poppy itself resembles the flag of a ship, waving proudly above a sea of mud. Notice, by the way, that the image of the solitary flower associated with the way of life of the artist-hero has become a much more positive symbol than it was in Jean Santeuil. Here, the poppy signals the possibility of travels and adventures to come, including, as we shall see later, a glimpse of a rosy young girl who seems to represent the dawn on the way to Balbec, a symbol of the best the pink hawthorn might have in store for him. (In all honesty, we must add that Balbec and the sea, somewhat idyllic on the first visit, is the scene of many emotional scenes on the second). Still, Marcel always sees voyages as the best form of escape from the imprisonment which he

imposes on himself as well as Albertine in Paris. And, immobilized by illness, Marcel still affirms that life itself is a voyage (P., p. 184). By contrast, in Jean Santeuil, the lone foxglove is associated with immobility; Jean compares himself to the uncommon flower, rather proud perhaps that, like it, he is alone. It is rooted to a sterile rock, and Jean is reminded of it when, later, he meets a nun shut away in a convent who yet manages to entertain lovers in this scarcely encouraging environment. This cold, forbidden love is as attractive to Jean as the warm semi-maternal love of the young milkmaid seems to Marcel. Nor does Jean's trip to the sea prove to be the voyage of experience which the poppy presages for Marcel.

Thus, even before he sees the pink hawthorns, Marcel seems destined for a trip which will take him away from the virginal white hawthorns, perhaps, most of all, away from childhood. When he does see the pink hawthorns and Gilberte, Marcel shows himself to be more mature as an artist than as a young lover, though these coloured hawthorns offer Marcel an introduction into "le mystère de la vie" (C. S., p. 142), rather than the more 'spiritual' mysteries suggested by the white hawthorns in the Combray church. The religious symbols remain, however, as a foreshadowing of the 'martyrdom' Marcel can expect as an artist, one which Vinteuil has already experienced. In nature as in art, a contrast between similar things can, to Marcel, bring the most important insights of all, and a great joy.

Alors me donnant cette joie que nous éprouvons quand nous voyons de notre peintre préféré une oeuvre qui diffère de celles que nous connaissions, ou bien si l'on nous mène devant un tableau dont nous n'avions vu jusque-là qu'une esquisse au crayon, si un morceau entendu seulement au piano nous apparaît ensuite revêtu des couleurs de l'orchestre, mon grand-père, m'appelant et me désignant la haie de Tansonville, me dit : "Toi qui aimes les aubépines, regarde un peu cette épine rose; est-elle jolie!" En effet c'était une épine, mais rose, plus belle encore que les blanches. Elle aussi avait une parure de fête, - de ces seules vraies fêtes que sont les fêtes religieuses, puisqu'un caprice contingent ne les applique pas comme les fêtes mondaines à un jour quelconque qui ne leur est pas spécialement destiné, qui n'a rien d'essentiellement férié - mais une parure plus riche encore, car les fleurs attachées sur la branche ... étaient "en couleur", par conséquent d'une qualité supérieure, selon l'esthétique de Combray, si l'on en jugeait par l'échelle des prix dans le "magasin" de la Place ou chez Camus où étaient plus chers ceux des biscuits qui étaient roses. Moi-même j'appréciais plus le fromage à la crème rose, celui où l'on m'avait permis d'écraser des fraises. Et justement ces fleurs avaient choisi une de ces teintes de chose mangeable ou de tendre embellissement à une toilette pour une grande fête, qui, parce qu'elles leur présentent la raison de leur supériorité, sont celles qui semblent belles avec le plus d'évidence aux yeux des enfants et, à cause de cela, gardent toujours pour eux quelque chose de plus vif et de plus naturel que les autres teintes, même lorsqu'ils ont compris qu'elles ne promettaient rien à leur gourmandise et n'avaient pas été choisies par la couturière ... Au haut des branches ... pullulaient mille petits boutons d'une teinte plus pâle qui, en s'entr'ouvrant, laissaient voir, comme au fond d'une coupe de marbre rose, de rouges sanguines (sic), et trahissaient, plus encore que les fleurs, l'essence particulière, irrésistible, de l'épine, qui, partout où elle bourgeonnait, où elle allait fleurir, ne le pouvait qu'en rose. Intercalé dans la haie, mais aussi différent d'elle qu'une jeune fille en robe de fête au milieu de personnes en négligé qui resteront à la maison, tout prêt pour le mois de Marie, dont il semblait faire partie déjà, tel brillait en souriant dans sa fraîche toilette rose l'arbuste catholique et délicieux.

(C. S., p. 139-40).

This passage offers an excellent point of departure for a discussion of Proust's colour imagery. It contains a fascinating mixture of the viewpoint of the naive Marcel and that of the narrator, especially in as much as the various symbols set down by the narrator are definitely

prophetic for Marcel. Indeed, the contrast between the youthful and unfinished and the mature and finished is the point of the passage, whether Proust is talking about the hawthorns as a work of art, Vinteuil's sonata and septet, or his gradually maturing hero. Of course, we do realize that Marcel has finally found in his novel the 'frame' he sought - "Puis je revenais devant les aubépines (the white ones) comme devant ces chefs-d'oeuvre dont on croit qu'on saura mieux les voir quand on a cessé un moment de les regarder, mais j'avais beau me faire un écran de mes mains pour n'avoir qu'elles sous les yeux, le sentiment qu'elles éveillaient en moi restait obscur" (C. S., p. 139). In fact, in this excerpt Proust starts with the triumphant red, the sign of mature success, the joy it inspires, and works down through the suffering that precedes the joy, ending with the childhood pleasure that the young Marcel still associates with the colour red. Following our own usual pattern, we will reverse the process, moving from the naive Marcel to the mature artist (in this case Vinteuil).

To the young Marcel, the tinge of red adds a sensual dimension to the flowers, as it reminds him of the colouring added to 'superior quality' biscuits, or of strawberries crushed into cream cheese. The flowers can also form the additional ornament needed to make a girl's dress into a party dress. As usual, girls and food are not too far apart in Marcel's mind, reminding us of Jean Santeuil's description of a waitress, wearing a white dress with a pink sash and carrying dishes of food with

(40) Proust, *Marcel : Jean Santeuil*, Vol. 1, p. 212.

(41) Barthes, *French Literature : Semiotics in the Works of Proust*, The Catholic University of America, Washington, 1969, p. 24.

all the grace of a dancer ⁽⁶⁰⁾. Such extra colour suggests a celebration in nature - a celebration of nature. But true feasts or festivals have something of a religious significance. Since red is the colour of martyrdom, and the hawthorn was traditionally supposed to have supplied the crown of thorns, it is not surprising that, in the red-tinged hawthorn, Proust emphasizes symbols of suffering as well as symbols of joy. The mixture of viewpoints of the young and the older Marcel can be found in the description of the hawthorn as "l'arbuste catholique et délicieux". Although Proust may well mean by "délicieux" 'delightful', there is no doubt that the blossoms do remind him of things to eat, and "une fête" is usually marked by a special meal. Of course, in the Christian religion, the most important symbolic meal is the communion. Thus, when Proust talks of seeing, within the hawthorn buds "comme au fond d'une coupe de marbre rose, de rouges sanguines (sic)", we know that he is referring to the Last Supper, or communion, to the 'Catholic' part of this bush, as Francis Fardwell has pointed out ⁽⁶¹⁾. "Une coupe", as a drinking vessel, reminds us of the chalice, and the blood-red tinge refers to Christ's blood. If we break the French word for hawthorn down into its component parts, as Proust himself, with his interest in fictional etymology undoubtedly would, we find two words 'l'aube' and l'épine'. Despite the fact that the true etymology of 'l'aubépine' is based on the Latin word for white and the French word for thorn, Proust seems to have been influenced

(60) Proust, Marcel : Jean Santeuil, Vol. 1, p. 232.

(61) Fardwell, Francis Virginia : Landscape in the Works of Proust, The Catholic University of America, Washington, 1948, p. 56.

by the phonetic breakdown. Here, he insists on the thorn, calling the pink hawthorn solely "l'épine". The young Proust, indeed, equated the thorn of a flower with suffering in a rather precious fashion. In a letter to Suzette Lemaire, thanking her for some flowers, he remarks that her absence is the thorn of these flowers ⁽⁶²⁾. In A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, however, the mature Marcel, at the moment of finding his vocation, also affirms the necessity of suffering for the artist (T. R., p. 897). We shall see Marcel, rather revelling in his unhappiness, talking of "le sanglant sacrifice ... de toute joie" (S. G., p. 1128) that the suspicion of an affair between Mlle Vinteuil and Albertine brings. Similarly, a reference to Calvus mons reminds him of Chaumont where Albertine supposedly betrayed him, and he resigns himself to a crucifixion of jealousy (F., p. 543). But, if an artist must suffer for the sake of his art, he can at least expect from it a form of resurrection. When Marcel sees his work in print for the first time, he has a foretaste of that eternal morning ~~which Proust associates with "l'aube"~~ ^{which Proust associates with "l'aube"} "l'aube". He likens his feelings to "une aurore qui me remplissait de plus de force et de joie triomphante que l'aurore innombrable qui en même temps se montrait rose à toutes les fenêtres" (F., p. 570). For the first time, Marcel really looks outside the house in which his love for Albertine has imprisoned him. In fact, before he even opens the copy of le Figaro in which his first work appears, Marcel has been enjoying the glory of the dawn, which seems to urge him to travel and; perhaps, to encounter once again a rosy young milkmaid, a creature of the dawn,

(62) Proust, Marcel : Lettre à Suzette Lemaire, Bulletin no. 14, 1974, p. 137.

such as he saw on the way to Balbec. Thus, as in the Christian religion, the sorrow inherent in the symbols of crucifixion associated with the hawthorn just presages a final overwhelming joy, the red tinge of the blossoms suggesting not only blood, but also the colour of the sky at dawn.

We can see that the nearer Marcel comes to being an artist, the more he experiences the pattern of sorrow and joy which the hawthorns seem to imply. However, even when he is completely lacking in experience, Marcel never doubts that the hawthorns have a 'message' and something of the aesthetic nature of this message (the highest spiritual values in Proust works are always aesthetic) is revealed by his choice of metaphor (mainly chosen from music) in describing the great joy the sight of the pink hawthorns give him after the rather callow picture presented by the simpler white hawthorns. It is as though Marcel, rather like a believer in Plato, feels that an original pattern exists, a pattern one can recognize as such before having lived it oneself. But the original exists not in some other world of ideas, but in the work of artists who have lived to the full. Since M. Vinteuil is the greatest 'martyr' in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, and since his last work, the expression of his triumph over personal tragedy, is rescued from oblivion by the very person who caused him such unhappiness, we are not surprised that the metaphors Proust uses to describe the differences between the two hawthorns remind us not only of the difference between youth and maturity, but also of the differences between Vinteuil's sonata and his septet. Marcel talks of the white hawthorns having

"une allégresse juvénile" and complains that they are like "ces mélodies qu'on rejoue cent fois de suite sans descendre plus avant dans leur secret" (C. S., p. 138) although the fault may well lie not in the hawthorns, nor in their musical equivalent, the sonata, but in Marcel's own circumstances, in that he has nothing with which to compare them. As soon as he sees the pink hawthorn, he feels that the added element of colour (analogous to the quality of maturity gained through suffering) somehow finishes, or completes the flowers :

Alors, me donnant cette joie que nous éprouvons quand nous voyons de notre peintre préféré une oeuvre qui diffère de celles que nous connaissions, ou bien si l'on nous mène devant un tableau dont nous n'avions vu jusque-là qu'une esquisse au crayon, si un morceau entendu seulement au piano nous apparaît ensuite revêtu des couleurs de l'orchestre, mon grand-père, m'appelant et me désignant la haie de Tansonville, me dit : "Toi qui aimes les aubépines, regarde un peu cette épine rose; est-elle jolie"! En effet, c'était une épine, mais rose, plus belle encore que les blanches
(C. S., p. 139).

The analogy between the two hawthorns and the two works of art is very obvious here. The sonata is written only for piano and violin. And, in Mme Verdurin's salon, even the violin is missing. Later, Odette plays the sonata on the piano, and Swann seems fully satisfied with this version, despite her lack of talent and the missing violin. It is not as though he is ignorant of the 'complete' version. He first heard the sonata with both violin and piano. Thus, especially as fuller orchestration is equated with more colour and with maturity, we must assume that, in settling for an incomplete sonata, Swann is showing himself capable of settling for an incomplete life as well. And he never has a chance to hear the septet, which is fully orchestrated,

and which, when Marcel hears it, gives an impression of maturity, completion, and joy which Marcel, as we shall see, once again associates with the colour red, and the immortal dawn of art.

If this passage, then, looks forward to Marcel's encounter with Vinteuil's septet, made all the more piquant by his acquaintance with the sonata, so does the septet passage look back to this particular day in Combray, and, in fact, to the encounter with Gilberte. For there are, here, three separate examples of the contrast of white with red - the white and pink (or red-tinged) hawthorns, the white sonata and red septet (when we discuss Marcel's description, on first hearing the septet, we will see how sophisticated has become Proust's colour symbolism at this later stage in Marcel's artistic apprenticeship), and "une blanche jeune fille, distraite et vive" (C. S., p. 112), Mlle Vinteuil, as opposed to "une petite fille rousse" (C. S., p. 142), Gilberte. We will discuss this particular choice of the word 'rousse' to describe Gilberte in a moment, but, first of all, let us look at the picture, the countryside, which "la petite phrase" evokes in Marcel when he recognizes it in the septet, and we will see that the two hawthorns, the two pieces of music and the two young girls are forever linked in Marcel's mind, one might even say in his personal mythology or fairy tale.

Le concert commença, je ne connaissais pas ce qu'on jouait, je me trouvais en pays inconnu. Où le situer? Dans l'oeuvre de quel auteur étais-je? J'aurais bien voulu le savoir, et, n'ayant près de moi personne à qui le demander, aurais bien voulu être un personnage de ces Mille et une Nuits que je relisais sans cesse et où, dans les moments d'incertitude, surgit

soudain un génie ou une adolescente d'une ravissante beauté, invisible pour les autres, mais non pour le héros embarrassé, à qui elle révèle exactement ce qu'il désire savoir. Or à ce moment, je fus précisément favorisé d'une telle apparition magique. Comme quand, dans un pays qu'on ne croit pas connaître et qu'en effet on a abordé par un côté nouveau, après avoir tourné un chemin, on se trouve tout d'un coup déboucher dans un autre dont les moindres coins vous sont familiers, mais seulement où on n'avait pas l'habitude d'arriver par là, on se dit tout d'un coup : Mais c'est le petit chemin qui mène à la petite porte du jardin de mes amis; je suis à deux minutes de chez eux"; et leur fille en effet est là qui est venue vous dire bonjour au passage; ainsi, tout d'un coup, je me reconnus, au milieu de cette musique nouvelle pour moi, en pleine sonate de Vinteuil; et, plus merveilleuse qu'une adolescente, la petite phrase, enveloppée, harnachée d'argent, toute ruisselante de sonorités brillantes, légères et douces comme des écharpes, vint à moi, reconnaissable sous ces parures nouvelles.

(P., p. 248-249).

(63)

How well this passage evokes the fairy tale or wish fulfillment level of Marcel's first encounter with Gilberte. As in the real incident, she seems to appear by magic (or even by the miracle Marcel wishes for when he sees her fishing line) on the little path that Marcel knows so well, although, years later, Gilberte, as this passage suggests, approaches Tansonville from a different direction making the familiar countryside seem foreign to Marcel. As for her invisibility, in the real encounter, Marcel hopes (vainly) that his grandfather or father who have gone on ahead, will not see her. Indeed, there are various differences between the real and the re-evoked meeting which shows us the intricate, many-layered reality which Proust describes. In the scene brought to mind by the little phrase of the music, the daughter of his friends welcomes him, and there is a door, an entrance, to their garden. Marcel, however, chooses to pass by. In fact, he spurns this beautiful adolescent for a much more serious rival, art, in this case, music.

(63) The underlining is my own.

In the real scene, the girl is more important than the idea of music, more important even than the hawthorns. She is the focus of his dreams, his ideal. Far from welcoming him at the garden gate, she seems to have "un air indifférent et dédaigneux" (C. S., p. 141) and she makes "un geste indécent" which, Marcel feels, must express "une intention insolente" (C. S., p. 141). There are many, many clues in the description of Marcel's first encounter with Gilberte (many of them colour clues) as well as a comment from the narrator as to Marcel's youthful lack of objectivity which warn the reader that Marcel is regarding the whole scene through the ambience of fairy tale - seeing 'la vie en rose' as the French might say, or regarding Gilberte through 'rose coloured glasses' as we might say. The following quotation will show the idyllic setting and Marcel's tendency to denigrate himself, to feel excluded, and to worship others. It is in all senses a more highly coloured description of the meeting than that evoked by the septet :

La haie (the hawthorn hedge) laissait voir à l'intérieur du parc une allée bordée de jasmins, de pensées et de verveines entre lesquelles des giroflées ouvraient leur bourse fraîche du rose odorant et passé d'un cuir ancien de Cordoue, tandis que sur le gravier un long tuyau d'arrosage peint en vert, déroulant ses circuits, dressait, aux points où il était percé, au-dessus des fleurs dont il imbibait les parfums, l'éventail vertical et prismatique de ses gouttelettes multicolores. Tout à coup, je m'arrêtai, je ne pus plus bouger, comme il arrive quand une vision ne s'adresse pas seulement à nos regards, mais requiert des perceptions plus profondes (which, we shall see later, Marcel does not yet possess) et dispose de notre être tout entier. Une fillette d'un blond roux, qui avait l'air de rentrer de promenade et tenait à la main une bêche de jardinage, nous regardait, levant son visage semé de taches roses ...

Je la regardais, d'abord de ce regard qui n'est pas que le porte-parole des yeux, mais à la fenêtre duquel se penchent tous les sens, anxieux et pétrifiés, le regard qui voudrait toucher, capturer, emmener le corps qu'il regarde et l'âme avec lui; puis, tant j'avais peur que d'une seconde à l'autre mon grand-père et mon père, apercevant cette jeune fille, me fissent

éloigner en me disant de courir un peu devant eux, d'un second regard, inconsciemment supplicateur, qui tâchait de la forcer à faire attention à moi, à me connaître ... elle laissa ses regards filer de toute leur longueur dans ma direction, sans expression particulière, sans avoir l'air de me voir, mais avec une fixité et un sourire dissimulé que je ne pouvais interpréter d'après les notions que l'on m'avait données sur la bonne éducation que comme une preuve d'outrageant mépris ... (Here, Gilberte makes the indecent gesture we have already mentioned).

- Allons, Gilberte, viens; qu'est-ce que tu fais, cria d'une voix perçante et autoritaire une dame en blanc que je n'avais pas vue, et à quelque distance de laquelle un monsieur habillé de coutil et que je ne connaissais pas, fixait sur moi des yeux qui lui sortaient de la tête; et cessant brusquement de sourire, la jeune fille prit sa bêche et s'éloigna sans se retourner de mon côté, d'un air docile, impénétrable et surnois.

Ainsi passa près de moi ce nom de Gilberte, donné comme un talisman qui me permettrait peut-être de retrouver un jour celle dont il venait de faire une personne et qui, l'instant d'avant, n'était qu'une image incertaine. Ainsi passa-t-il, proféré au-dessus des jasmins et des giroflées, aigre et frais comme les gouttes de l'arrosoir vert; imprégnant, irisant la zone d'air pur qu'il avait traversée - et qu'il isolait - du mystère de la vie de celle qu'il désignait pour les êtres heureux qui vivaient, qui voyageaient avec elle; déployant sous l'épinier rose, à hauteur de mon épaule, la quintessence de leur familiarité, pour moi si douloureuse, avec elle, avec l'inconnu de sa vie où je n'entrerais pas.

Un instant (tandis que nous éloignons et que mon grand-père murmurait : "Ce pauvre Swann, quel rôle ils lui font jouer : on le fait partir pour qu'elle reste seule avec son Charlus, car c'est lui, je l'ai reconnu! Et cette petite, mêlée à toute cette infamie!") l'impression laissée en moi par le ton despotique avec lequel la mère de Gilberte lui avait parlé sans qu'elle répliquât, en me la montrant comme forcée d'obéir à quelqu'un, comme n'étant pas supérieure à tout, calma un peu ma souffrance, me rendit quelque espoir et diminua mon amour. Mais bien vite cet amour s'éleva de nouveau en moi comme une réaction par quoi mon coeur humilié voulait se mettre de niveau avec Gilberte ou l'abaisser jusqu'à lui. Je l'aimais, je regrettais de ne pas avoir eu le temps et l'inspiration de l'offenser, de lui faire mal, et de la forcer à se souvenir de moi. Je la trouvais si belle que j'aurais voulu pouvoir revenir sur mes pas, pour lui crier en haussant les épaules : "Comme je vous trouve laide, grotesque, comme vous me répugnez!" Cependant je m'éloignais, emportant pour toujours, comme premier type d'un bonheur inaccessible aux enfants de mon espèce de par des lois naturelles

impossibles à transgresser, l'image d'une petite fille rousse, à la peau semée de taches roses, qui tenait une bêche et qui riait en laissant filer sur moi de longs regards surnois et inexpressifs. Et déjà le charme dont son nom avait encensé cette place sous les épines roses où il avait été entendu ensemble par elle et par moi, allait gagner, enduire, embaumer tout ce qui l'approchait, ses grands-parents que les miens avaient eu l'ineffable bonheur de connaître, la sublime profession d'agent de change, le douloureux quartier des Champs-Élysées qu'elle habitait à Paris.
(C. S., pp. 140-143).

We have already implied that this passage is very much a part of the novel as a whole; the reference in the last paragraph to Paris warns us of the continuation of Marcel's love for Gilberte in the future, whilst his grandfather's comment about Charlus revives a very old scandal indeed. As far as the Hawthorns are concerned, we have already mentioned the association with Vinteuil's septet, which evokes a simpler, happier version of the first momentous encounter with both the flower and the girl. Moreover, a much later passage, which we will discuss in detail when we reach it, finally solves the mystery behind Gilberte's gesture, a piece of knowledge which Marcel values greatly despite the fact that Gilberte no longer means anything to him, as it gives him an understanding into his own youthful powers of understanding (or lack of them).

However, this passage is also a masterpiece on its own. The whole scene has obviously become a permanent picture in Marcel's mind. In fact, we are reminded of a painting by Renoir of a little girl in a garden. Beneath the rich colours, the profusion of flowers and the almost fairy-tale garden, however, lie many complexities and ambiguities. Thus, the four paragraphs of the passage we have quoted hold all the beauty

of a fairy tale or myth, but the last paragraph brings us right down to earth, stating the misunderstandings behind the scene, the need Marcel seems to feel for worshipping others, for regarding Gilberte as inaccessible and the garden as forbidden territory, and the hurt that such a fairy tale situation can cause. Marcel all too easily seems to accept a humiliating role. This paragraph also shows that Marcel is not the only person out of touch with reality, as his father and grandfather obviously believe Charlus to be Odette's lover (untrue, simply because Charlus is homosexual and is chosen by Swann as a chaperone for his wife for that reason) and Gilberte to be a poor young innocent (wrong again, as we shall see). Since they discuss the scandal, although in veiled terms, hence the parentheses, in Marcel's hearing, we notice once again that the observant young Marcel had access to the knowledge that Combray is far from a second Eden, although he may not have understood the innuendoes fully.

However, before we discuss the darker elements of this seemingly idyllic scene, let us take a closer look at some of the fairy tales it evokes, as well as relating some of the religious terminology and symbolism to the theme of worship and (sometimes false) beliefs. The hawthorn, in English, takes its name from the Anglo-Saxon 'haive' or 'haeg', a hedge ⁽⁶⁴⁾. For this bush was chosen to enclose and protect land from unwelcome visitors not only because of its thorns and

(64) Genders, Roy : The Scented Wild Flowers of Britain, p. 100.

and durability, but also because of its assumed magical properties (65). In any case, the idea of Marcel being cut off from a young girl by a hedge of thorns, no matter how beautiful, must remind us of the fairy tale of the sleeping beauty (though it is Marcel, not Gilberte, who is not yet awakened to the sexual realities around him, as we saw in the image of the sleeping pond, and as is evident in his misunderstanding of the true meaning of Gilberte's obscene gesture). The secret garden, difficult to enter, and the girl guarded by the thorns also brings to mind Le Roman de la Rose. In fact, since Marcel is bitter about being denied entrance to Tansonville and to Gilberte's life, we feel that the park and Gilberte are symbolically linked. Gilberte is a flower-maiden, just as the ideal girl of the romance was a rose. In order to love the young Gilberte, Marcel must feel that she is inaccessible, far above him, in true Romantic and chivalric fashion, and, when Gilberte loses some of her aura of superiority by obeying 'la dame en blanc' (Odette, her mother), Marcel's hopes are raised, but his love for her is diminished. Finally, Tansonville, with its tempting flower maiden forbidden to him, must seem to Marcel like a lost Eden, promising "un bonheur inaccessible aux enfants de mon espèce de par les lois naturelles impossibles à transgresser" (C. S., p. 143). Now, here we come to the real crux of the situation. For some reason or another, Marcel and Jean Santeuil regard it of the utmost importance to be accepted into circles they regard as superior to their own. They frequently find themselves longing for admittance outside parks or gardens owned by supposedly superior people. When they are rejected, they automatically

(65) Grigson, Geoffrey : The Englishman's Flora, pp. 181-2.

assume themselves to have been judged to be inferior, and do all they can to prove themselves equal or superior (usually successfully) though the success never brings them joy. Here, however, if anything, Marcel's parents will not allow Marcel to mix with the Swanns because, by Combray standards, Swann's marriage to Odette has made them socially and morally inferior. And, certainly the Swanns have been lax with Gilberte; their lack of supervision has enabled her to gain the sexual knowledge that she wishes to hand on to Marcel. Once again we can see a parallel with the story of Genesis, in which the temptation took place in God's absence. Swann, Gilberte's father is literally and symbolically absent from his garden.

Marcel talks of Gilberte's name as being a talisman; he talks as though he shared the ancient belief that a person's life is somehow wrapped up in his (or her) name and that a knowledge of a person's name gives one a knowledge of that person. This theme of the name bestowing a knowledge of its owner is extremely important in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, for, years later, he has a very similar encounter with Gilberte, but, because she has changed her name, he does not recognize her. Ironically, looking over the dead expanse of his life after Albertine has left, and noticing that a desire for women is finally reblossoming in it, Marcel invokes the forget-me-nots (the forgotten forget-me-nots of Gilberte's park) - "Nulle part il ne germe autant de fleurs, s'appelassent-elles 'ne m'oubliez pas', que dans un cimetière" (F., p. 561). Yet Marcel is in the process of forgetting Albertine,

and does not remember Gilberte despite the similarities between his first meeting and this one. Once again, Gilberte is one of three people; three girls this time; Charlus, Odette and Gilberte the first time. Three is the number of fate, the number of the Norns (see the introduction) who control one's lifespan. Marcel's fate comes from the flaws in his own character, which, we are warned by the number three, are going to prevent him from learning from past mistakes. Indeed, he thinks he has improved with experience - "Au télégraphe, tout en rédigeant ma dépêche (to Saint-Loup, to find out if the strange young girl is the same with whom he had an affair) avec l'animation de l'homme qu'échauffe l'espérance, je remarquais combien j'étais moins désarmé maintenant que dans mon enfance, et vis-à-vis de Mlle d'Eporcheville que de Gilberte" (F., p. 565). Yet he is confused enough not to recognize the same situation, and, once again, to build in his imagination a love for a woman whom he does not know, a love based on things she does not have; here, the name "d'Eporcheville" (Gilberte's name is now de Forcheville); in the hawthorn passage, blue eyes, whereas Gilberte's eyes are actually black. Once again, Marcel is inflamed by a glance. Once again, he loves Gilberte's blondness and frailty (or seeming innocence), her contrasting slyness or hidden sexuality. Once again he is rooted to the spot at the sight of her. And, once again her name is of the utmost importance to him, bringing us back to the theme of the importance of a person's name to Marcel.

In the role of worshipper, Marcel talks of "le charme dont son nom avait encensé cette place" and the word 'encensé' reminds us of the

close bond between the Combray church, the act of worship and the hawthorns. But, if he were really to recall the Combray mythology associated with the church, Gilberte's name would alert him to her true nature expressed in the gesture he misunderstood. To begin with, Gilberte has freckles, just as the hawthorns had flecks on their petals. Both sully the 'purity' of girl and flower. In the Combray church, too, one of the windows which fascinates Marcel contains a stained glass portrait of Gilbert le Mauvais, a rather unsavoury character out of Combray's past, whose name is very similar to Gilberte's. In Proust's novel, it is more often the females who seem to bring evil into the life of his hero, so much so that Proust talks about "une espèce de péché originel de la femme, un péché qui nous les fait aimer, de sorte que, quand nous l'oublions, nous avons moins besoin d'elle et que, pour recommencer à aimer, il faut recommencer à souffrir" (P., p. 151). However, although this sentiment agrees with the symbol of the thorn and the garden as the Garden of Eden and temptation, it occurs much later in the book, and we cannot forget entirely the rainbow, the flowers and their perfumes which do lend some of the idyllic qualities of Eden to the garden at Tansonville.

The other fairy tales and myths suggested by this passage are also somewhat sinister. Marcel is rendered immobile by the sight of Gilberte. In return, he tries to 'capture' her with "ce regard ... à la fenêtre duquel se penchent tous les sens, anxieux et pétrifiés" (C. S., p. 141) ⁽⁶⁶⁾.

(66) The underlining is my own.

At the same time, Charlus, as Marcel says, "fixait sur moi des yeux qui lui sortaient de la tête". In fact, what Marcel fails to realize is that, far from being isolated, superior human beings, the people he sees through the hedge are experiencing the same emotion as he; they may as well be mirror images, Gilberte's sly look probably corresponding to Marcel's supplicatory look, whilst Charlus' intense stare, his eyes nearly popping out of his head, is probably very similar to Marcel's possessive stare. Later, Charlus tries to stare Marcel down with a ferocious countenance which reminds Marcel of "mille serpents d'écume" (C. G., p. 554). And, when Marcel finally totally possesses Albertine, she seems to turn to stone under his gaze (P., p. 359, p. 386). Somehow, the theme of possession, (especially of the life which goes on behind a person's eyes) and of the possessive glance, so romantic in many schools of poetry, has become mixed up with the myth of the medusa.

In fact, the main clue as to Marcel's inability to understand the true nature of Gilberte comes from a passage describing her eyes - their colour especially - and his lack of experience in observing, in really seeing what is in front of him :

Ses yeux noirs brillaient et, comme je ne savais pas alors, ni ne l'ai appris depuis, réduire en ses éléments objectifs une impression forte, comme je n'avais pas, ainsi qu'on dit, assez "d'esprit d'observation" pour dégager la notion de leur couleur, pendant longtemps, chaque fois que je repensais à elle, le souvenir de leur éclat se présentait aussitôt à moi comme celui d'un vif azur, puisqu'elle était blonde : de sorte que, peut-être si elle n'avait pas eu des yeux aussi noirs - ce qui frappait tant la première fois qu'on la voyait - je n'aurais pas été, comme je le fus, plus particulièrement amoureux, en elle, de ses yeux bleus (C. S., pp. 140-141).

Marcel, then is suffering the particular dilemma of the Romantic lover, worshipping a being who is largely created by his imagination. The mistake in eye colour would not be so serious on its own, but, unfortunately it is only one example, and a minor one at that, of Marcel's illusions about Gilberte. Moreover, the actual colour symbolism involved is important in the pattern of the novel. Blue, to Marcel, is the noble colour for eyes; the Duchess of Guermantes has blue eyes. It is the colour of Geneviève de Brabant's belt in Marcel's magic lantern show and is traditionally associated with the Virgin. "l'azur" is an even more significant term, with its wealth of meaning in Mallarmé's poem of the same name - a spiritual realm, the ideal, the freedom and depth of the sky regarded from the viewpoint of the earthbound mortal. Black, on the other hand, is associated with death and shadows; in Proust's private symbolism, as we shall see in the rose chapter, it is a very negative colour. In imagining Gilberte to be other than she is, Marcel is following in Swann's footsteps. Swann's own epitaph on his love affair with Odette is the following comment which Proust uses to end the book called Un Amour de Swann : "Dire que j'ai gâché des années de ma vie, que j'ai voulu mourir, que j'ai eu mon plus grand amour, pour une femme qui ne me plaisait pas, qui n'était pas mon genre" (C. S., p. 382).

We have already discussed the association of red with martyrdom, suffering, thorns, and experience. However, the particular word for red which Proust uses to describe Gilberte - 'rousse' - has a certain

meaning in his own symbolism, for it forms, phonetically, part of the name 'Roussainville', the place where the Combray youngsters used to go to play their erotic games. Much later in the novel, Gilberte, harking back to the encounter under the pink hawthorns, explains that her gesture was meant as an invitation to Roussainville for Marcel. Moreover, if Marcel is following in Swann's footsteps, she, to some extent, is following Odette's. Odette has turned respectable (or at least, as respectable as Combray will allow) and now wears white, as though to emphasize her new role. But she used to be "la dame en rose" (C. S., p. 76), her life dedicated to lovers.

Thus, in studying this scene, in which the people present seem to represent every possible shade of love, from Odette with her occasional lesbian affair, her many past lovers and her husband; Charlus, with his professed homosexuality; Marcel with his romantic young love, and Gilberte with her more down-to-earth seduction, the air practically seems to crackle with desire as Marcel, Gilberte and Charlus eye each other. It is almost as though the hawthorn were influencing the human beings with its own vitality and sexuality, all the more obvious in the highly coloured variety. Certainly, the pink hawthorns seem to have a hold on the Combray imagination. Their effect on people is exactly what one would expect from a flower previously associated with the return of life in spring. Marcel's grandfather refers, in one of his favourite anecdotes, to the day he spent at Tansonville comforting

Swann's father for the death of his wife. Yet the greatest source of comfort turns out to be the hawthorns, for, on noticing them, Swann père cries out : "Ah! mon viel ami, quel bonheur de se promener ensemble par ce beau temps! Vous ne trouvez pas ça joli, tous ces arbres, ces aubépines et mon étang dont vous ne m'avez jamais félicité?" (C. S., p. 15). This story is supposed to illustrate the Swann inability to dwell for any length of time on serious issues - but it shows just as much the strong link between the Swanns and their garden, and the effect of the hawthorns on their owners.

Nor are the Swanns the only ones to feel the potency of the hawthorns. Just after the pink hawthorn passage, on their return home, Marcel's father and grandfather urge Aune Léonie, who believes herself dying, to go to see the hawthorns, as though they had some credit for rejuvenating power in Combray folklore. She agrees that she would love to visit Tansonville, see Swann and the hawthorns, but she renounces this plan as she gradually renounces life :

c'est ce grand renoncement de la vieillesse qui se prépare à la mort, s'enveloppe dans sa chrysalide, et qu'on peut observer, à la fin des vies qui se prolongent tard, même entre les anciens amants qui se sont le plus aimés, entre les amis unis par les liens les plus spirituels, et qui à partir d'une certaine année cessent de faire le voyage ou la sortie nécessaire pour se voir (C. S., p. 143).

Like Aunt Léonie, Marcel associates the hawthorns specifically with Swann, and he incorporates them into his own personal mythology :

Ma tante n'alla pas voir la haie d'épines roses, mais à tous moments je demandais à mes parents si elle n'irait pas, si autrefois elle allait souvent à Tansonville, tâchant de les faire parler des parents et grands-parents de Mlle Swann qui

me semblaient grands comme des dieux. Ce nom, devenu pour moi presque mythologique, de Swann, quand je causais avec mes parents, je languissais du besoin de le leur entendre dire, je n'osais pas le prononcer moi-même [like the hidden name of God] (C. S., p. 144).

Now, we have already seen that there is a good cause for regarding Swann as a Fisher King figure. In addition to the clues furnished by various references to the quest legend, Swann's bond with the hawthorns seem to confirm him in his role as a source of life, of experience, though he himself must die, rather like the old fertility or tree gods of myth. With his spiky red hair and his green eyes, Swann even resembles the hawthorns (C. S., p. 14). He brings the fruit and flowers of Tansonville as presents to Marcel's parents. He seems to feel free to choose any woman he likes, at this point of his life. Later, of course, his life with Odette will be very arid, almost like a half death, but, even then, Marcel will acknowledge the debt he owes to Swann for the direct or indirect introduction he furnished to the experience he needed for his novel :

la matière de mon expérience, laquelle serait la matière de mon livre, me venait de Swann ... Pédoncule un peu mince peut-être pour supporter ainsi l'étendue de toute ma vie (le "côté de Guermantes" s'étant trouvé en ce sens ainsi procéder du "côté de chez Swann"). Mais bien souvent cet auteur des aspects de notre vie est quelqu'un de bien inférieur à Swann (T. R., p. 915).

The choice of a flower metaphor is Marcel's real acknowledgement of Swann's role in his life. Unfortunately for Swann, his life never does have an artistic flowering, although it does follow a succession of psychological 'seasons' (as we shall see in the conclusion) not at all out of keeping with the Fisher King theme. However, for him

winter is the last season, an idea emphasized by the hawthorn imagery. At his last important social outing, (he gives up these, too, for Odette) he meets one of his oldest friends, the Duchess of Guermantes, whose headdress reminds him of a frozen hawthorn. Still, through Marcel, he does gain his share of immortality; his name lives on in Marcel's books, which is just as well, as his daughter, whom he trusted to carry on his name, repudiates it. Thus Marcel says, "Et pourtant, cher Charles Swann, que j'ai si peu connu quand j'étais encore si jeune et vous près du tombeau, c'est déjà parce que celui que vous deviez considérer comme un petit imbécile a fait de vous le héros d'un de ses romans, qu'on recommence à parler de vous et que peut-être vous vivrez" (P., p. 200). For Marcel takes over Swann's role as creator and artist, as a new king takes over from the old, or, since he shoulders the task of carrying on Swann's name, as a son takes over from his father; here, the Galahad-Lancelot parallel pertains. (The first clue that Marcel has 'lost' his father and is searching for a substitute occurs when, as he says, "je pleurais sur les pages de l'écrivain Bergotte comme dans les bras d'un père retrouvé" (C. S., p. 96).) All these details of course are in harmony with the legend of the Fisher King, incorporated into the grail legend, in which the young knight must restore life to the Wasteland. On a more down to earth level, the detail that Swann *may have considered* Marcel "comme un petit imbécile" (there is no real evidence for this in the text), but that he is now indebted to Marcel for his immortality illustrates the Cinderella aspect of the theme of social rejection common in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu and Jean Santeuil.

As soon as the reader has decided that the hawthorns are very serious symbols indeed, Proust adds a humorous passage to convince us that they can be taken too seriously, and perhaps, to emphasize that his novel is not a tragedy, no matter how important its theme. In fact, the pattern of the novel as a whole seems to demand that the serious passages - the description of the white hawthorns in the Combray church, of the pink hawthorns in Swann's park, the flowerless bush at Balbec, Vinteuil's hawthorns of music, and Gilberte's final remembered hawthorns - are alternated with humorous passages, although the former are more numerous. Just after the pink hawthorns are introduced, Marcel describes thus a tearful parting with his beloved hawthorns :

Cette année-là, quand, un peu plus tôt que d'habitude, mes parents eurent fixé le jour de rentrer à Paris, le matin du départ, comme on m'avait fait friser pour être photographié ... après m'avoir cherché partout, ma mère me trouva en larmes dans le petit raidillon contigu à Tansonville, en train de dire adieu aux aubépines ... et, comme une princesse de tragédie à qui pèseraient ces vains ornements ... foulant aux pieds mes papillotes arrachées et mon chapeau.
(C. S., p. 144-145).

Marcel has chosen here a rather ridiculous role comparing himself with Racine's Phèdre. He loves to overdramatize and is, one suspects, quite pleased to choose a feminine persona - but, basically he is just a youngster, rather spoiled perhaps, who does not realize how important it will be for him to ~~return to Paris~~ ~~Combray~~, and to gain a perspective on Combray's country ways. Not for him the tragic, but the comic role of the artist leading towards some sort of new dawn, of resurrection, in his art. As we have seen, this is the message of the poppy, presaging Marcel's voyage to the sea and of the pink, dawn coloured hawthorns.

Marcel's trip to Balbec starts out as a joyous adventure, despite his initial fears. To begin with, he realizes for the first time that his mother has a private life apart from him, other tasks than looking after him (J. F., p. 648), and he fears leaving her and clings all the harder to his grandmother. Thus, it is significant that the first young girl he meets offers him the motherly comfort of *café au lait*. Even more than that, her face catches the reflection of the outstanding rose and golden dawn to such an extent that, when Marcel says "*je m'éloignais de l'aurore*" (J. F., p. 657), we wonder whether he is referring to the girl as a personification of the dawn. Moreover, as she has just given Marcel '*un regard perçant*', she continues the theme of the significant glance associated with Gilberte and the pink hawthorns.

This girl is just the first of many whom Marcel's imagination chooses to see as a personification of the landscape in which he finds them. The fishergirls at Balbec, too, take on from their association with the sea a mystery which is probably not theirs intrinsically. Yet, as we have seen in the previous hawthorn passages, Marcel loves mysteries and is attracted to girls who are in some way associated with forbidden places, who are themselves, being virgins, forbidden territory. Their gazes form part of their mystery, although these looks are more often misunderstood rather than really ambiguous. But at Balbec, although he still relishes the secrecy surrounding young girls, Marcel becomes aware of the possibility of dispelling these mysteries and coming to

know or possessing these girls. At Tansonville, Marcel nibbled at, but finally rejected, Gilberte's bait. Here, he somehow feels that his gaze alone can demystify and capture the young fishergirls; though he decides not to, the theme of fishing draws him inexorably towards Albertine and the band of young girls, whom he will come to know personally, so that the concept of virginal, flowering young girls will never be the same to him, as the image of the Balbec hawthorn bush without flowers suggests.

Gazing at the fishergirl, Marcel feels "cette prise de force de son esprit, cette possession immatérielle, lui avait ôté de son mystère autant que fait la possession physique" (J. F., p. 717). As with the image of the pool in the encounter with Gilberte, there is something very narcissistic about this interchange of glances, "Et cet être intérieur de la belle pêcheuse semblait m'être clos encore, je doutais si j'y étais entré, même après que j'~~eus aperçu~~^{ai aperçu} ma propre image se refléter furtivement dans le miroir de son regard" (J. F., p. 716).

The fishing motif comes to a climax with the appearance of "les jeunes filles en fleurs" - Albertine and her band :

Et même le plaisir que me donnait la petite bande, noble comme si elle était composée de vierges helléniques, venait de ce qu'elle avait quelque chose de la fuite des passantes sur la route. Cette fugacité des êtres qui ne sont pas connus de nous, qui nous forcent à démarrer de la vie habituelle où les femmes que nous fréquentons finissent par dévoiler leurs tares, nous met dans cet état de poursuite où rien n'arrête plus l'imagination. Or dépouiller d'elle nos plaisirs, c'est les réduire à eux-mêmes, à rien. Offertes chez une de ces entremetteuses que, par ailleurs, on a vu que je ne méprisais pas, retirées de l'élément qui leur donnait tant de nuances et de vague, ces jeunes filles m'eussent

moins enchanté. Il faut que l'imagination, éveillée par l'incertitude de pouvoir atteindre son objet, crée un but qui nous cache l'autre et, en substituant au plaisir sensuel l'idée de pénétrer dans une vie, nous empêche de reconnaître ce plaisir, d'éprouver son goût véritable, de le restreindre à sa portée. Il faut qu'entre nous et le poisson qui, si nous le voyions pour la première fois servi sur une table, ne paraîtrait pas valoir les mille ruses et détours nécessaires pour nous emparer de lui, s'interpose, pendant les après-midi de pêche, le remous à la surface duquel viennent affleurer, sans que nous sachions bien ce que nous voulons en faire, le poli d'une chair, l'indécision d'une forme, dans la fluidité d'un transparent et mobile azur. (J. F., p. 796). (67)

In fact, Marcel is experiencing that 'whirlpool' which was still asleep at the time when he gazed into Gilberte's pond when he watches the young girls go by "les visages ... emportés dans un tourbillon" (J. F., p. 797). As with the hawthorns, Marcel cannot resist emphasizing the gustatative side of his metaphors. Here, in fact, this metaphor of pursuing and devouring one's prey is a bit sinister :

Mais peut-être aussi c'était grâce à ces différences, à la conscience qu'il n'entraînait pas, dans la composition de la nature et des actions de ces filles, un seul élément que je connusse ou possédasse, que venait en moi de succéder à la satiété, la soif - pareille à celle dont brûle une terre altérée - d'une vie que mon âme, parce qu'elle n'en avait jamais reçu jusqu'ici une seule goutte, absorberait d'autant plus avidement, à longs traits, dans une plus parfaite imbibition. (J. F., p. 794, 795).

Marcel seems to draw life from these young women much as Swann's father and Aunt Léonie drew new life from the hawthorns. At one point, explaining how tired he feels in ordinary society, yet how full of energy in the company of young girls, he uses the metaphor of the convalescent refreshed in a garden (J. F., p. 910). Indeed, Marcel is attracted to the girls because in many ways they are his opposites, strong and healthy whilst he is frail, non-intellectuals whilst he

(67) The underlining is my own.

feels the burden of living up to his potential; "en devenant l'ami de l'une d'elles j'eusse pénétré - comme in païen raffiné ou un chrétien scrupuleux chez les barbares - dans une société rajeunissante où régnaient la santé, l'inconscience, la volupté, la cruauté, l'inintellectualité et la joie" (J. F., p. 830).

Notice how contrary Marcel is here. He has finally been accepted into polite, refined, intellectual Christian society at Balbec through his grandmother's acquaintance with Mme de Villeparisis (related to the important Guermantes). He regards girls from the point of view of a 'refined Christian', using a plant image from the biblical parable - "leurs tares" - to describe their blemishes or faults (J. F., p. 796). Yet he prefers the type of society they offer for the 'pagan' or barbarous qualities they possess - health, sensuality, cruelty, joy. They involve him in a primitive role - that of the cunning fisherman; they, of course, are the delectable food, the fish that he finally lands. Ritual fish feasts are known to have been important parts of fertility rites, so Marcel's symbolism is very suitable in this 'pagan' atmosphere.

There is no doubt that, with the help of Mlle de Villeparisis, Marcel has found a place at the feast of the privileged, despite the snubs that he had to put up with (especially from the delectable Mlle de Stermaria) before his grandmother's friend appeared on the scene. At one point, the benevolent attentions of the noble friends of Mme de Villeparisis do seem like crumbs from a rich man's table. Marcel is

far from amused when the princess of Luxembourg treats him and his grandmother like lower beings, animals in fact, to be fed as in a zoo :

Ne sachant que faire pour nous témoigner sa bienveillance, la princesse arrêta le premier qui passa; il n'avait plus qu'un pain de seigle, du genre de ceux qu'on jette aux canards. La princesse le prit et me dit : "C'est pour votre grand-mère ... Vous le lui donnerez vous-même", pensant qu'ainsi mon plaisir serait plus complet s'il n'y avait pas d'intermédiaires entre moi et les animaux
(J. F., pp. 699-700).

Thus, the theme of social acceptance which Marcel associated with the garden and its hawthorn hedge barrier and sex, he now associates with food (as he did in the context of the tea rituals, too). In the following quotation, he turns the roles around, having learned a more sophisticated attitude towards rejection or patronizing acceptance. The rich and noble now become the strange creatures to be stared at, the fish in an aquarium, tame, imprisoned, unlike the wild, free fisher-girls or the girls he sees as game fish :

Et le soir ils ne dinaient pas à l'hôtel où, les sources électriques faisant sourdre à flots la lumière dans la grande salle à manger, celle-ci devenait comme un immense et merveilleux aquarium devant la paroi de verre duquel la population ouvrière de Balbec, les pêcheurs et aussi les familles de petits bourgeois, invisibles dans l'ombre, s'écrasaient au vitrage pour apercevoir, lentement balancée dans des remous d'or, la vie luxueuse de ces gens, aussi extraordinaire pour les pauvres que celle de poissons et de mollusques étranges (une grande question sociale, de savoir si la paroi de verre protégera toujours le festin des bêtes merveilleuses et si les gens obscurs qui regardent avidement dans la nuit ne viendront pas les cueillir dans leur aquarium et les manger)
(J. F., p. 681).

One of the things that Marcel likes best about the girls is that they are a band, a group. In fact, they seem to him to be as exclusive a group as any of the elite cliques that he sees at Balbec, and, moreover,

they have a boisterous, obvious way of expressing contempt for those who do not belong to their youthful, healthy minority. Marcel is delighted when one of them accepts the dare to jump over a sick old man on the promenade. Immediately, especially since he has been sick so often himself, he wants to join them, to get out of the 'zoo' or even the more privileged 'aquarium', and to share with them the freedom of a 'creature of flight'. Yet, Andrée, the girl in the band who jumps over the old man is neither cruel nor unintelligent nor even very well; in fact, she is really very similar to Marcel. And Albertine, seemingly contemptuous of the crowd at Balbec can be very fussy about appearances. We will discuss other illusions of Marcel's, as with the hawthorns, when we look at the colour symbolism associated with the girls.

Apart from the metaphor of the girls representing an exciting chase and a rewarding (fish) meal to Marcel, one of the most evocative comparisons he uses in this early passage describing the girls, likens them to 'les vierges helléniques'. We shall discuss in detail later Marcel's continuing search for virgins who are also sensual (here, as though to fit in with the Greek theme, he uses the phrases "dionysiaque" (J. F., p. 893), and "la bacchante à bicyclette, la muse orgiaque du golf" (J. F., p. 873) to describe the girls). But the idea of the Hellenic virgins expresses as well Marcel's search, or quest for beauty, an overriding desire in him which turns this encounter, like the one under the hawthorns into an aesthetic experience. The older Marcel, the narrator, is under no illusions, freely admitting that beauty is

in the mind (if not the eye) of the beholder, and can be projected onto an object which may not itself be beautiful.

J'étais dans une de ces périodes de la jeunesse, dépourvues d'un amour particulier, vacantes, où partout - comme un amoureux, la femme dont il est épris - on désire, on cherche, on voit la Beauté. Qu'un seul trait réel - le peu qu'on distingue d'une femme vue de loin, ou de dos - nous permette de projeter la Beauté devant nous, nous nous figurons l'avoir reconnue, notre coeur bat ... et nous resterons toujours à demi persuadés que c'était elle.
(J. F., p. 787).

Yet this possibility of disillusionment does not stop Marcel from describing the girls in terms of Greek statues and, more important in the continuity of the hawthorn imagery, in terms of music. "Et n'était-ce pas de nobles et calmes modèles de beauté humaine que je voyais là, devant la mer, comme des statues exposées au soleil sur un rivage de la Grèce"? (J. F., p. 791). And he talks of the group of girls as "cet ensemble, merveilleux parce qu'y voisinaient les aspects les plus différents, que toutes les gammes de couleurs y étaient rapprochées, mais qui était confus comme une musique où je n'aurais pas su isoler et reconnaître au moment de leur passage les phrases, distinguées mais oubliées aussitôt après" (J. F., p. 790).

This latter quotation brings us immediately to the theme of colour (especially eye colour) and illusions. Once again, Marcel cannot determine the colour of his future love's eyes, let alone interpret her glance. Here, her eyes give off 'un rayon noir' (J. F., p. 794). Yet, as Simons points out ⁽⁶⁸⁾, Marcel describes her eyes as sometimes

(68) Simons, M. : Les Regards dans 'A la Recherche du Temps Perdu', p. 503.

blue (J. F., p. 946), or black (S. G., p. 1014) or having "un regard blond" (P., p. 408). Marcel also misunderstands Albertine's seemingly bold glance, because of which he picks her out in particular as being not very virtuous. He imagines the whole group as being the young mistresses of a group of cyclists (J. F., p. 793), although this hardly fits in with their 'virginal' image. Actually, as one quotation we have already used (concerning the fishergirl) points out, Marcel sees in others' eyes a reflection of himself, or, as in this case, a reflection of his dreams and desires - these he terms his beliefs, for our young hero longs to worship something. Although his misunderstanding of others may not have improved, Marcel's understanding of himself has, to the extent that he will now acknowledge in himself this impulse towards worship which leads him to project his dreams onto others.

Once Marcel meets the girls and discovers how friendly they really are, he thinks "je ne me souvenais même pas qu'elles étaient les mêmes vierges impitoyables et sensuelles que j'avais vues, comme dans une fresque (notice again the simile taken from art) défiler devant la mer" (J. F., p. 949). Still, as further Hawthorne passages will show, Marcel at this point has much yet to learn from the flowers and flower maidens about the nature of virginity, especially considering the association with the Greek way of life which occurs in the first description of the band and which recurs throughout A l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs. The sensuality which attracts Marcel to these girls, as well as their

'cruelty', turn out to be illusions, as we have already mentioned. Albertine alone will not kiss Marcel and goes out of her way to avoid hurting anyone. We can only assume that this mixture of virginity, sensuality and cruelty are as much a part of Marcel's (or perhaps Proust's) fantasies as they are part of Mlle Vinteuil's.

The fishergirl and the first confrontation with the band of young girls leads us towards the main hawthorn passage in A l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs, which occurs after Marcel has made friends with 'les jeunes filles en fleurs'. The descriptions of Marcel's reactions to the fishergirl and to the band of young girls has continued the themes of fishing, of the ambiguous glance, and of his own inability to see people as they are, as expressed in colour imagery. They also reintroduce the theme of virginity, which will become so important in the future hawthorn passages. Now, in these descriptions of Balbec girls, we have had, all along, the benefit of the opinion of the mature Marcel, through the medium of the narrator. In the first Balbec hawthorn passage, we listen to the voice of the youthful, idealistic Marcel on its own. Marcel's innocence and ignorance is all the more poignant since, as future hawthorn passages show, he has lost them by the time of his second visit to Balbec. Thus, with a dreadful irony, subsequent hawthorn texts give us the necessary perspective in which to understand the young Marcel's attitudes, a perspective usually offered by the narrator. Thus, while the first trip to Balbec finds Marcel composing a paeon of praise to the virginal, coquettish young girls who

are always evoked in his mind by the hawthorns, the second trip finds him associating the hawthorns with a much more cynical view of 'les jeunes filles pieuses' who make assignations with young men in church, and girls such as Bloch's sisters, whom Marcel suspects of lesbianism. The clues to the change in Marcel's mind can be found in the blows to his system of beliefs which he experiences in the intervening stay in Paris, disillusionments which are reflected to a certain extent in the hawthorn imagery. To begin with, Marcel finds out that the Guermantes' salon is neither as holy nor as exclusive as he thought, and that Mme de Guermantes and even Françoise do not love him. Albertine, on the other hand, no longer superior, virginal and inaccessible, becomes his mistress. Thus, it is no wonder that the Combray hawthorns seem rather ridiculous in Françoise's melodramatic farewell to Combray, and remind Marcel of weddings and storms rather than of virginity (C. G., p. 12). Now, in context, we can see the ironies of Marcel's ode to the Balbec hawthorns, although, if we look at the passage carefully enough, we can see clues in the text itself that suggest that Marcel has lost his way :

Tout d'un coup, dans le petit chemin creux, je m'arrêtai touché au coeur par un doux souvenir d'enfance : je venais de reconnaître, aux feuilles découpées et brillantes qui s'avançaient sur le seuil, un buisson d'aubépines défleuries, hélas, depuis la fin du printemps. Autour de moi flottait une atmosphère d'anciens mois de Marie, d'après-midi du dimanche, de croyances, d'erreurs oubliées. J'aurais voulu la saisir. Je m'arrêtai une seconde et Andrée, avec une divination charmante, me laissa causer un instant avec les feuilles de l'arbuste. Je leur demandai des nouvelles des fleurs, ces fleurs de l'aubépine pareilles à de gaies jeunes filles étourdies, coquettes et pieuses. "Ces demoiselles sont parties depuis déjà longtemps", me disaient les feuilles. Et peut-être pensaient-elles que pour le grand ami d'elles que je prétendais être, je ne semblais guère renseigné sur leurs habitudes. Un grand ami, mais qui ne les avait pas revues depuis tant d'années, malgré ses promesses. Et pourtant, comme Gilberte

avait été mon premier amour pour une jeune fille, elles avaient été mon premier amour pour une fleur. "Oui, je sais, elles s'en vont vers le mi-juin, répondis-je, mais cela me fait plaisir de voir l'endroit qu'elles habitaient ici. Elles sont venues me voir à Combray dans ma chambre, amenées par ma mère quand j'étais malade. Et nous nous retrouvions le samedi soir au mois de Marie. Elles peuvent y aller ici? - Oh! naturellement! Du reste on tient beaucoup à avoir ces demoiselles à l'église de Saint-Denis-du-Désert, qui est la paroisse la plus voisine. - Alors, maintenant pour les voir? - Oh! pas avant le mois de mai de l'année prochaine. - Mais je peux être sûr qu'elles seront là? - Régulièrement tous les ans. - Seulement je ne sais pas si je retrouverai bien la place. - Que si! ces demoiselles sont si gaies, elles ne s'interrompent de rire que pour chanter des cantiques, de sorte qu'il n'y a pas d'erreur possible et que du bout du sentier vous reconnaîtrez leur parfum" (69)
(J. F., p. 922).

When we consider how much the hawthorns mean as symbols in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, we cannot dismiss this passage, as we might be tempted to, as a piece of whimsy. On the very simplest level, the fact that there are no blossoms on the bush here merely emphasizes the fact that Marcel has forgotten his promise to remain close to nature and has arrived too late for their blossoming. Moreover, at this stage in his life, he is more interested in human flower maidens, the band of young girls who replace the hawthorns (and Gilberte) in his life. Yet, as he comes to know the girls better, Marcel comes to suspect all the more (and with good reason) that the ideal of innocent, pious, coquettish girlhood which he associates with the hawthorns does not exist in fact, hence, symbolically, the absence of the flowers Marcel connects with such girls. The fact that he can still carry on a conversation with them in his mind shows the extent to which they are creations of his imagination. Perhaps it is not even too much to read an omen into the

(69) The underlining is my own.

fact that these hawthorn 'maidens' officiate at the church of Saint-Denis-du-Désert, for Balbec, at least on his second trip, will be a desert and a wilderness to Marcel. Even the detail of their perfume has an ironic parallel in the course of Marcel's involvement with the band of young girls, as we shall see when we discuss the incident of the seringas. So, to a certain extent, the deflowered or flowerless bush could be said to presage Marcel's loss of innocence (if not of virginity) or that of the young girls themselves. Marcel possibly shows some recognition of this fact when he says that he remembers "une atmosphère d'anciens mois de Marie, d'après-midi du dimanche, de croyances, d'erreurs oubliées" (J. F., p. 922). Proust makes it quite clear that Marcel's beliefs (and errors) are centered on people, rather than on any system of religion. As far as the Balbec girls are concerned, the first blow to Marcel's beliefs occurs when Albertine will not kiss him; ironically, the second one occurs when she does make love to him in Paris. However, all the experience which he gains from the young girls is of more importance to the future artist than the knowledge to be gained in Elstir's studio, or, to be more precise, one of the most precious gifts Elstir offers to Marcel is his formal introduction to Albertine and the band of girls :

Ces réflexions me faisaient trouver un sens plus fort et plus exact à la vérité que j'ai souvent pressentie, notamment quand Mme de Cambremer se demandait comment je pouvais délaisser pour Albertine un homme remarquable comme Elstir. Même au point de vue intellectuel je sentais qu'elle avait tort, mais je ne savais pas ce qu'elle méconnaissait : c'était les leçons avec lesquelles on fait son apprentissage d'homme de lettres (T. R., pp. 906-7).

In fact, Elstir's actual advice to Marcel is that he should live a full life in order to become a better artist, advice Marcel distrusts, suspecting the painter of idolatry because he considers his wife to be the ideal of beauty. Truth to tell, Marcel is courting this temptation himself, since he wishes to see Elstir paint hawthorns, having formed a cult for the flowers. Fortunately or unfortunately, Elstir is more interested in painting radishes. As far as Marcel is concerned, the most important lesson of many of Elstir's pictures is that there is no clear border between many objects commonly considered as opposite or mutually exclusive. His paintings show land melting into sea or vice versa, a man meeting a semi-divine creature from mythology, two women together, their intertwined limbs resembling swan's necks, and an androgynous creature, Miss Sacripant, who turns out to be Odette. Indeed, Marcel's companion of the walk past the hawthorn bush, Andrée, is a similar creature, bringing us closer to understanding the mystery of 'les jeunes filles en fleurs'. Marcel discovers in himself a remarkable resemblance to Andrée :

A ce moment je m'aperçus dans la glace; je fus frappé d'une certaine ressemblance entre moi et Andrée. Si je n'avais pas cessé depuis longtemps de raser ma moustache et si je n'en avais eu qu'une ombre, cette ressemblance eût été presque complète. C'était peut-être en regardant, à Balbec, ma moustache qui repoussait à peine qu'Albertine avait subitement eu ce désir impatient, furieux, de revenir à Paris.
(F., p. 549).

So, once again, we encounter a narcissistic image and the theme of lesbianism associated with the hawthorns. Marcel here, of course is worried that Albertine and Andrée were lovers. Andrée tells him that

he almost caught them together once and that they blamed their confusion on an allergy for the seringa that Marcel had brought Albertine (F., p. 601). Marcel calls their desire for each other "une sombre fleur inconnue" (F., p. 546). The girls, then, in their association with flowers and with their perfumes, are neither as pretty nor as pious as the demoiselles of the church of Saint-Denis-du-Désert.

However, there is a further, more obvious lesson to be gained from the hawthorn bush without its flowers - the lesson of the change of all things, a positive and hopeful lesson in nature, but, to Marcel at any rate, a depressing one when it concerns 'les jeunes filles en fleurs'. The hawthorns will return every year; Nature is generous with its miracle of Vendredi Saint, its springtime resurrection. Human beings, however, unless they have a spiritual resurrection through art and thus a chance to share in the eternal morning which Vinteuil's septet seems to celebrate, dwindle in beauty in the autumn and winter of their lives. While watching the young girls, Marcel mourns the passing of youth, "l'aurore de la jeunesse" "il est si court, ce matin radieux" (J. F., p. 905). And he is dismayed to see in their withered mothers and aunts, ageing caricatures of the beautiful young girls.

Hélas! dans la fleur la plus fraîche on peut distinguer les points imperceptibles qui pour l'esprit averti dessinent déjà ce qui sera, par la dessiccation ou la fructification des chairs aujourd'hui en fleur, la forme immuable et déjà prédestinée de la graine. On suit avec délices un nez pareil à une vaguelette qui enfle délicieusement une eau matinale ... Mais il suffisait de voir à côté de ces jeunes filles leur mère ou leur tante, pour mesurer les distances que, sous l'attraction interne d'un type généralement affreux, ces traits auraient traversées dans moins de trente ans.
(J. F., p. 891).

Perhaps coming to terms with human seasons, with the changes Time will bring, is the most difficult problem that Marcel will face, as we will see in more detail in the rose chapter and the conclusion. Certainly this problem emphasizes the difference between Marcel and Swann, Marcel's final acceptance of flux lending truth to his artistic vision, whilst Swann, dedicating himself to the 'art of life', tries desperately to freeze time and to preserve the ones he loves in immutable forms (portraits, photos, memories associated with pieces of music) which conform to his ideals.

The main changes we can see in the next hawthorn passage, referring to Marcel's second trip to Balbec, have occurred within Marcel himself. The passage we will quote is the unpublished draft, which is, however, very similar to the one Proust included in the final version of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. Proust probably rejected the first draft as being too obviously didactic, yet this very quality makes it more interesting to the general reader, giving, as it does, proof of a mistrust of "les jeunes filles pieuses" which, although it exists in the subtler passages, is less easy to pin down. In both versions, Marcel has just passed 'l'éblouissante maison de "plaisir" ' (S. G., p. 785) at Maïneville when, drawn by their perfume, he notices the hawthorns, described in practically the same words in both versions. However, in the earlier and more extended version, it is Bloch's sisters, not the Marcel of the later passage, who turn away, indifferent, from the hawthorns. The introduction of these sisters, who are lesbian and Jewish, (remember Proust's association of homosexuals and Jews as outcast races) and the

ironic reference to the 'pious young girls' who honour the month of Mary make this passage much more indicative of the whole tone of Marcel's second trip to Balbec, with its great disillusionment about 'les jeunes filles en fleurs' :

Tout à coup je fus appelé par l'odeur des aubépines qui, comme à Combray, le mois de mai, suivaient une haie ... (There follows the comparison of the apple trees and the hawthorns, using the metaphor of cider merchants' daughters and poor nobility which can also be found in the final version). Je n'eus pas le coeur de rester auprès d'elles, et pourtant je n'avais pas pu m'empêcher de m'arrêter. Mais les soeurs de Bloch, que j'aperçus et qui ne me virent pas, ne détournèrent même pas la tête vers les aubépines. Celles-ci ne leur avaient fait aucun appel et ne leur avaient rien dit; elles étaient comme ces jeunes filles pieuses qui ne manquent pas un mois de Marie, d'où elles ne craignent pas de s'adresser à la dérobée à un jeune homme à qui elles donnent rendez-vous dans la campagne, et même par qui elles se laisseront embrasser dans la chapelle quand il n'y aura personne, mais qui pour rien au monde, car cela leur a été bien défendu, n'adresseront la parole, ni ne joueront avec les enfants d'une autre religion.

(S. G., Notes et Variantes, p. 786).

(70)

We can see how ironic this paragraph is when compared with the description of the flowerless bush and the pious young maidens of the first trip to Balbec. Especially we can see the irony behind Marcel's invocation of "une atmosphère d'anciens mois de Marie, d'après-midi du dimanche, de croyances, d'erreurs oubliées" (J. F., p. 922). By this second trip to Balbec, Marcel is beginning to realize that the coquettish side of the young girls is definitely stronger than their pious façade, and that his concept of virginity and innocence, probably inspired by the image of the Virgin Mary celebrated by the Combray hawthorns may well rank high amongst his old 'beliefs and errors'. It is worth while re quoting here

(70) The underlining is my own.

Marcel's comments on the ~~Diana-like~~ qualities in the band of young girls, "elle était composée de vierges helléniques" (J. F., p. 796); and later he finds it hard to believe that these now friendly girls were "les mêmes vierges impitoyables et sensuelles" (J. F., p. 949). Finally, on the second trip to Balbec, a comment by Dr. Cottard on the pleasure that Andrée and Albertine seem to derive from dancing together introduces Marcel to Gomorrah and lends another meaning entirely to the phrase 'Greek maidens'. The first girls to arouse Marcel's suspicions and jealousy after Cottard's remarks are Bloch's sister and cousin, the latter at least being a known lesbian. So this much at least is not changed from the first version of the Hawthorne passages we have been examining. Marcel also begins to read double meanings into every action and phrase of Albertine's - desire in her glance at Bloch's sister and cousin, a lesbian connotation in her exaggerated claim that she will commit suicide, "Jamais je ne vous avais encore vu si cruel. La mer sera mon tombeau ... Je me noierai, je me jetterai à l'eau" says Albertine. "Comme Sapho" replies Marcel (S. G., p. 801). This exchange would be very funny if we did not already know the anguish that his suspicions cause Marcel.

This discussion of the nature of 'les jeunes filles en fleurs' may seem to have taken us away from flower imagery, but a quotation from Essais et Articles shows us that the source of the title for the book describing Marcel's first trip to Balbec is very much concerned with the concept of virginity and the image of human or moral flowers. While

discussing Baudelaire's Les Fleurs du Mal, Proust tells us that Baudelaire was going to call his book Les Lesbiennes (71). Unlike Vigny, who declares that "La Femme aura Gomorrhe et l'Homme aura Sodome" (Proust introduces Sodome et Gomorrhe with this quotation) and who goes on to say that "Les deux sexes mourront chacun de son côté" (72), Baudelaire has sympathy for female homosexuality. As Proust quotes, "Car Lesbos entre tous m'a choisi sur la terre/ Pour chanter le secret de ses vierges en fleurs/ Et je fus dès l'enfance admis au noir mystère" (73). Now, such a strong resemblance between the phrases "les vierges en fleurs" and "les jeunes filles en fleurs" cannot surely be a coincidence, especially considering the themes of the poem and of the book. Thus, we must assume that Proust was influenced by Baudelaire's strange use of the word 'virgin' for lesbians, meaning, we suppose that such females are innocent of dealings with men, through preference if not through youth. Proust, we have seen, seems to use this sense of 'virgin' for Mlle Vinteuil. The phrase "le noir mystère" is also suited to the colour imagery that Proust associates with Albertine, as we shall see in the rose chapter. And we have already remarked that the strange scene between Mlle Vinteuil and her friend could be regarded as a black mass.

Yet another ambiguity is added to Proust's use of the phrase "les jeunes filles en fleurs" in view of a quotation from André Gide's diary.

(71) Proust, Marcel : Essais et Articles, Editions Gallimard, 1971, p. 632.

(72) Ibid, p. 620.

(73) Ibid, p. 633. The underlining is my own.

Here, Proust insists to Gide that Baudelaire was a homosexual, and gives as his reason for so believing Baudelaire's sympathy for and knowledge of lesbians, "Il me dit la conviction que Baudelaire était uraniste : 'La manière dont il parle de Lesbos, et déjà le besoin d'en parler suffiraient seuls à m'en convaincre' " (74). Now, if a need to talk of lesbianism is the mark of the homosexual, then we must have suspicions as to the true viewpoint of both Proust and Marcel on this subject. Indeed, later, another passage in Gide's diary explains Proust's attitudes further :

Nous n'avons, ce soir encore, guère parlé que d'uranisme; il dit se reprocher cette "indécision" qui l'a fait, pour nourrir la partie hétérosexuelle de son livre, transposer "à l'ombre des jeunes filles" tout ce que ses souvenirs homosexuels lui proposaient de gracieux, de tendre et de charmant, de sorte qu'il ne lui reste plus pour Sodome que du grotesque et de l'abject. Mais il se montre très affecté lorsque je lui dis qu'il semble avoir voulu stigmatiser l'uranisme; il proteste; et je comprends enfin que ce que nous trouvons ignoble, objet de rire ou de dégoût, ne lui paraît pas, à lui, si repoussant. (75)

Proust's personal leanings, of course, are only important in this thesis in the extent to which they affect his art. The fact that the 'band of girls' may have been a band of boys from Proust's own experience, however, helps to explain all the similarities between Marcel and Andrée and, even, Mlle Vinteuil, both lesbians. Thus, this narcissistic element which we have already commented on in many Hawthorne passages is explained by the theory that the people who may have acted as models for Proust's characters were actually of the same sex and had the same sexual leanings as Proust, whose hero must to some extent

(74) Gide, André : Journal, 1889-1939, Librairie Gallimard, 1948, p. 692.

(75) Ibid, p. 694.

mirror him. This further, personal, level of interpretation of Proust's work adds to the mystery and ambiguity of A l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs in a way Gide found sometimes irritating and sometimes admirable. "Tant de subtilité est, parfois, complètement inutile; il n'y fait que céder à un maniaque besoin d'analyse. Mais souvent cette analyse l'amène à d'extraordinaires trouvailles" (76). And, we might add, on a less serious level, the ambiguities in Proust's characters lend A la Recherche du Temps Perdu some of the excitement of a psychological puzzle or a detective novel. Gide, moreover, has a much more serious criticism to make of Proust, as we have seen in the introduction, a suggestion that he failed in his attempt to confront the truth about himself in his novel :

Pour la question sexuelle, j'admire qu'ils crient comme Souday : "La mesure est comble", alors qu'elle commence seulement à se remplir craintivement. Ceux-ci font indirectement l'apologie de l'hypocrisie et du rassurant camouflage pratiqué par un si grand nombre de littérateurs, et des plus illustres, à commencer par Proust. La vérité, si longtemps mise sous le boisseau, paraît indiscrètement importune dès qu'elle commence à se montrer. Les quelques timides peintures que certains audacieux en risquent sont encore si timorées, si réticentes, qu'elles choquent sans nullement satisfaire à la vérité, (77)

In his most grave criticism of Proust, Gide was obviously sincerely worried that Proust's works would exacerbate the prevalent prejudices against homosexuality :

J'ai lu les dernières pages de Proust ... avec, d'abord, un sursaut d'indignation. Connaissant ce qu'il pense, ce qu'il est, il m'est difficile de voir là autre chose qu'une feinte, qu'un désir de se protéger ... Bien plus : cette offense à la vérité risque de plaire à tous : aux hétérosexuels dont elle justifie les préventions et flatte les répugnances; aux autres,

(76) Ibid, p. 1322.

(77) Ibid, p. 1087.

qui profiteront de l'alibi et de leur peu de ressemblance avec ceux-là qu'il portraiture. Bref, la lâcheté générale aidant, je ne connais aucun écrit qui, plus que la Sodome de Proust, soit capable d'enfoncer l'opinion dans l'erreur.

(78)

Nowadays, the acceptance of homosexuality must lessen this worry of keeping prejudices alive. Indeed, it is Proust's apology for homosexuality, which appears at the beginning of Sodome which seems unnecessary today. The modern acceptance of the idea that pure masculine and feminine poles are rare fits in rather well with Proust's ambiguous attitude. The significance of the hawthorns in terms of the novel, we must add, can be quite well understood without the knowledge that Proust was a homosexual, but not without the assumption that 'les jeunes filles en fleurs' are lesbian. Other images, as we shall see in the orchid and pine tree chapter, are somewhat aesthetically damaged by Proust's reluctance to be totally honest about homosexuality.

Only in the context of art, and, later, Marcel's fulfilled quest, do the hawthorns regain an unambiguous meaning. However, before we do move on to the next stage of Marcel's quest or apprenticeship, let us 'recapitulate the story so far'. The white hawthorns epitomize coquettish innocence and virginity and a childhood religion to Marcel, yet they are associated with the strange, ambiguous figure of Mlle Vinteuil. Gilberte next appears linked to the pink hawthorns in Swann's garden, out of bounds for Marcel. Even here, the phantom of Mlle Vinteuil is not entirely exorcized; the white hawthorns are to the pink hawthorns

(78) Ibid, p. 705.

what Vinteuil's white sonata of innocence will be to his red septet, created out of the suffering caused him by his daughter. One could even say that the sonata is the white hawthorn of music, whilst the septet is the red-tinged one. Marcel, at this point, is incapable of understanding the hawthorns' message, or of interpreting the gestures and glances of the people beyond the hedge. At Balbec, on his first trip, he is attracted to and confused by the mystery of the band of young girls, whom he calls 'les jeunes filles en fleurs' and who gradually, in his mind take the place of the coquettish young hawthorn maidens whom he is too late to see. Yet, on his second trip to Balbec, he is introduced to Gomorrah and all it means to 'les jeunes filles en fleurs'. After this trip, he learns all there is to learn about the thorns of suffering and jealousy over Albertine. It is the darkest part of his quest; he loses confidence in love, and, more important to him, in art. Yet the darkness is not unrelieved. Marcel watches the dawn break while he reads his first published work. And the hawthorn also promises a more lasting dawn through art after the necessary trials, the self-doubt and suffering through love. The final flowering of the hawthorn/dawn theme occurs in the description of Vinteuil's septet, the creative spark behind which came from the suffering caused him by his daughter. To bring the theme of lesbianism full circle, Mlle Vinteuil's friend is responsible for finishing and publishing the septet.

The passage describing the septet (and, in retrospect, the sonata) corresponds to that moment in a knight's quest when the cock-crow and the dawn dispel the enchantments the night lends to the Chapel Perilous. Or, keeping in mind the fact that Proust's main source for his knowledge of the Arthurian legends was Wagner, the joyous peal of bells in Vinteuil's septet corresponds to the bells Parsifal hears when he breaks the enchantments and approaches the grail. (Marcel himself has long been wrapped up in the mysteries introduced, along with Mlle Vinteuil, in the Combray church, mysteries which turn out to be a great deal more dark than he at first realized). As usual, Proust prepares the introduction of this important turning point in Marcel's life very carefully. As soon as Albertine mentions her supposed friendship with Mlle Vinteuil's friend, Marcel feels that there will be no new mornings for him. He is sure that Albertine is lesbian and thus cannot love him. He talks of his 'martyrdom' (S. G., p. 1117), his mysterious passion (S. G., p. 1119), of "le sanglant sacrifice que j'allais avoir à faire de toute joie, chaque matin" (S. G., p. 1128), and of "la voie funeste et destinée à être douloureuse du Savoir" (S. G., p. 1115), thus fulfilling in the most spectacular symbols the omen of the tinge of blood of the rose hawthorns. Albertine, captured and possessed, becomes a shadow; her baggage reminds Marcel of coffins, bringing death into the house (P., p. 13). And, indeed, Marcel seems to have followed Albertine into the kingdom of death, just as Swann followed his Eurydice, Odette (C. S., p. 346). Of course, the difference between

Marcel and Swann is that Marcel will hear Vinteuil's septet and will struggle through his 'dark night of the soul' to a new dawn, whilst Swann will remain "un amateur de fantômes" (S. G., p. 1013). To Marcel, his life with Albertine seems "le soir prématuré de ma vie, qui semblait être aussi brève qu'un jour d'hiver" (P., p. 112). The lowest point comes when Marcel, listening to Vinteuil's sonata, remembers his artistic ambitions inspired by walks along the Guermantes' Way. He regrets, but accepts the idea of his failure as an artist, and wonders if life can console him for the loss of his art. (This, is of course, the choice Swann made).

Baigné dans l'attente pleine de sécurité de son retour avec Françoise ... je pouvais disposer de ma pensée, la détacher un moment d'Albertine, l'appliquer à la Sonate. Même en celle-ci, je ne m'attachai pas à remarquer combien la combinaison du motif voluptueux et du motif anxieux répondait davantage maintenant à mon amour pour Albertine ... Non, prenant la Sonate à un autre point de vue, la regardant en soi-même comme l'oeuvre d'un grand artiste, j'étais ramené par le flot sonore vers les jours de Combray - je ne veux pas dire de Montjouvain et du côté de Méséglise (scene of Mlle Vinteuil's lesbian affair), mais des promenades du côté de Guermantes - où j'avais moi-même désiré d'être un artiste. En abandonnant, en fait, cette ambition, avais-je renoncé à quelque chose de réel? La vie pouvait-elle me consoler de l'art? (P., p. 158).

Ironically, Marcel only goes to the Verdurin's musical gathering because he suspects Albertine, also keen to go, of an ulterior motive. And, indeed, he finds that Mlle Vinteuil's friend is expected to make an appearance; he is consumed with doubts and jealousy. But Mlle Vinteuil's friend makes a purely spiritual appearance - through the septet she rescued from Vinteuil's notes. So linked are his fate and Vinteuil's,

through the daughter, that Marcel (like Swann) cannot help but think of his own private worries during the playing of the septet, "Et je cessai de suivre la musique pour me redemander si Albertine avait vu ou non Mlle Vinteuil ces jours-ci" (P., p. 252). "je fus caressé au passage par une tendre phrase familiale et domestique du septuor. Peut-être - tant tout s'entre-croise et se superpose dans notre vie intérieure - avait-elle été inspirée à Vinteuil par le sommeil de sa fille... cause aujourd'hui de tous mes troubles" (P., p. 253). However, most of all, Marcel is struck by the contrast between sonata and septet, unfinished sketch and finished work of art, just as he was before by the contrast between the white and pink hawthorns. The differences he expresses in terms of two landscapes which, on a spiritual or emotional level, continue the theme of innocence and experience, the symbol of the dawn, and the colour symbolism of white and red :

Ce qui était devant moi me faisait éprouver autant de joie qu'aurait fait la Sonate si je ne l'avais pas connue; par conséquent, en étant aussi beau, était autre. Tandis que la Sonate s'ouvrait sur une aube liliale, et champêtre, divisant sa candeur légère mais pour se suspendre à l'emmêlement léger et pourtant consistant d'un berceau rustique de chèvre-feuilles sur des géraniums blancs, c'était sur des surfaces unies et planes comme celles de la mer que, par un matin d'orage commençait, au milieu d'un aigre silence, dans un vide infini, l'oeuvre nouvelle, et c'est dans un rose d'aurore que, pour se construire progressivement devant moi, cet univers inconnu était tiré du silence et de la nuit. Ce rouge si nouveau, si absent de la tendre, champêtre et candide Sonate, teignait tout le ciel, comme l'aurore, d'un espoir mystérieux. Et un chant perçait déjà l'air, chant de sept notes, mais le plus inconnu, le plus différent de tout ce que j'eusse jamais imaginé, à la fois ineffable et criard, non plus roucoulement de colombe comme dans la Sonate, mais déchirant l'air, aussi vif que la nuance écarlate dans laquelle le début était noyé, quelque chose comme un mystique chant du coq, un appel, ineffable mais suraigu, de l'éternel

matin. L'atmosphère froide, lavée de pluie, électrique - d'une qualité si différente, à des pressions tout autres, dans un monde si éloigné de celui, virginal et meublé de végétaux, de la Sonate - changeait à tout instant, effaçant la promesse empourprée de l'Aurore. A midi pourtant, dans un ensoleillement brûlant et passager, elle semblait s'accomplir en un bonheur lourd, villageois et presque rustique, où la titubation de cloches retentissantes et déchaînées (pareilles à celles qui incendiaient de chaleur la place de l'église à Combray, et que Vinteuil, qui avait dû souvent les entendre, avait peut-être trouvées à ce moment-là dans sa mémoire comme une couleur qu'on a à portée de sa main sur une palette) semblait matérialiser la plus épaisse joie. A vrai dire, esthétiquement ce motif de joie ne me plaisait pas; je le trouvais presque laid, le rythme s'en traînait si péniblement à terre qu'on aurait pu en imiter presque tout l'essentiel, rien qu'avec des bruits, en frappant d'une certaine manière des baguettes sur une table. Il me semblait que Vinteuil avait manqué là d'inspiration, et en conséquence, je manquai aussi là un peu de force d'attention ... Mais bien vite, le motif triomphant des cloches ayant été chassé, dispersé par d'autres, je fus repris par cette musique; et je me rendais compte que ... sa Sonate, et comme je le sus plus tard, ses autres oeuvres, n'avaient toutes été, par rapport à ce septuor, que de timides essais, délicieux mais bien frêles, auprès du chef-d'oeuvre triomphal et complet qui m'était en ce moment révélé (P., pp. 250-252). (79)

We can now see how prophetic was Marcel's description of his first encounter with the red-tinged, or pink, hawthorns :

Alors me donnant cette joie que nous éprouvons quand nous voyons de notre peintre préféré une oeuvre qui diffère de celles que nous connaissions ... si un morceau entendu seulement au piano nous apparaît ensuite revêtu des couleurs de l'orchestre, mon grand-père, m'appelant et me désignant la haie de Tansonville, me dit : "Toi qui aimes les aubépines, regarde un peu cette épine rose" (C. S., p. 139).

To Marcel, the inspiration before the living metaphor in nature or the aesthetic one in music is the same, the basis for a new insight, an emotional or spiritual upheaval. The encounter with the pink hawthorns

(79) The underlining is my own. Here we might add, to reintroduce the theme of the quest, that Proust himself associated "la petite phrase" with Wagner's operas; as André Coeuroy points out in Wagner et l'esprit romantique, Editions Gallimard, 1965, pp. 315-16. He quotes Proust as saying : "Dans la même soirée un peu plus loin, je ne serais pas surpris qu'en parlant de la petite phrase j'eusse pensé à L'Enchantement du Vendredi Saint".

belonged essentially to Swann's way, which seems to furnish Marcel with a great deal of his future emotional, or sexual, experience; the second such encounter, with the sonata and septet, belongs, Marcel thinks, to the Guermantes' Way, which he always associates with day dreams of artistic success. However, Marcel's Combray, like so many other things, is not based on a plan which keeps opposites (as Marcel thinks) apart; Elstir's lesson about the merging of unlike things holds here, too. As we shall see in the next Hawthorne passage, the way of love and experience (Swann's way) meets the way of art (the Guermantes' Way) at a crossroad which Gilberte, Marcel's original pink Hawthorne girl, shows him. In a number of passages, many of them Hawthorne passages, Marcel seems to have come full circle, back to the same old problem of the confrontation between white and red, innocence and experience; however, if we look at these passages closely we can see that with each one Marcel learns a little bit more and comes closer to his spiritual goal of artistic creativity.

All the symbols and images in this passage chart the progression of Marcel's quest towards maturity, towards becoming an artist - though his inability to appreciate Vinteuil's joyous motif shows that he is still quite far from his journey's end. Still, this passage marks perhaps the most important turning point in Marcel's life. As we have seen, Marcel up to this point has been having a very dark time of it. By keeping Albertine a prisoner, he has created a prison for himself.

His jealous care for her keeps him from visiting Venice, the city of the Renaissance, aptly symbolized by its sculptured phoenix, which can arise from its own ashes - "les oiseaux qui signifient à la fois la mort et la résurrection" (P., p. 368). Nor, while appointing himself Albertine's keeper, can he travel to Florence, city, to him, of spring flowers, especially the lily of Christ's resurrection (C. S., p. 386) and the anemone, the flowers of the dying and resurrected god, Adonis. It is also, of course, Dante's city and Dante's Divine Comedy also charts a journey towards a joyous, spiritual goal. Marcel begins to long for his freedom, for travel and for a new day (P., p. 394).

Later, Marcel will progress to the point that he appreciates the joyous theme of Vinteuil's septet, having had a surfeit of misery and jealousy. "D'autre part, la phrase qui m'avait paru trop peu mélodique, trop mécaniquement rythmée, de la joie titubante des cloches de midi, maintenant c'était celle que j'aimais le mieux, soit que je fusse habitué à sa laideur, soit que j'eusse découvert sa beauté" (P., p. 373). These bells, of course, remind Marcel of the church square at Combray, another link with the month of Mary and the hawthorns. And, we have already mentioned a possible comparison with a musical motif in Wagner's Parsifal. Thus Vinteuil's sonata and septet, as human landscapes, have as much to say about Marcel's stage in life as they had to say of Vinteuil's, and the images Marcel uses are as appropriate to him as they were to Vinteuil.

Then, too, the landscape of the septet in particular could well act as a background for a common incident in the Arthurian legend, that of the Chapel Perilous, as we have already hinted. At the core of this particular incident is the theme of the enchanted night, during which the quester is held immobile and impotent by a powerful spell to which he is vulnerable through his own sin or weakness. The episode usually takes the form of a vigil in a deserted chapel, where the knight is in great danger until the cock crow, announcing dawn, dissolves the enchantment. This theme of cock crow and dawn delivering the hero is common to folklore and fairy tale as well, so there is no doubt that Proust was conscious of its significance. Let us just add here that Proust said : "aimer est un mauvais sort comme ceux qu'il y a dans les contes, contre quoi on ne peut rien jusqu'à ce que l'enchantement ait cessé" (T. R., p. 706). Indeed, Proust repeats the cock crow theme at the exact moment of Marcel's emotional and spiritual (of course in Proust's terms this means artistic) awakening, when he realizes that the prison which holds him is created by his love affair with Albertine, symbolized by the mournful cooing of the dove, here associated with the immature sonata. However, we will discuss the bird symbolism in much greater detail in the lilac chapter, where it is more pertinent. The mythological significance of the coming of the dawn should interest us most here, as Proust's septet landscape fits in so well with a persuasive theory as to one interpretation of the incident of the Chapel Perilous. Jessie Weston feels that this adventure harks back to

(31) Weston, *Jessie : From Myth to Reality*, p. 181.

the old initiation rites of the nature religions. The first initiation (in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu analogous to Marcel's meeting with Gilberte under the hawthorns - he failed) is a physical one, but the second, on a higher level, and more difficult, is a spiritual one, perhaps involving drugs, certainly involving danger, hence the term Chapel Perilous (80). Even if we discount this theory, we are still faced with all of Proust's references to Orpheus, both in Swann's and Marcel's lives, and the Orphic mysteries were definitely concerned with initiation rites and a ritual descent to the underworld. In Proustian terms, Swann, following Odette, never escapes the wintry, infertile way of life she leads him to, never passes this final spiritual or artistic trial. Marcel, despite the fact that Albertine brings night, death and imprisonment into his life, does escape, although largely through the death of Albertine herself. For him, there will be a new awakening, especially since he, unlike Swann has never entirely given up art. And, as an initiation into love leads to death and decline, the sad message of the flowerless hawthorn bush, so an initiation into art leads eventually to the resurrection which Bergotte enjoyed through his books and Vinteuil through his music. The septet leads not just to the morning, but to "l'éternel matin". Marcel, as an artist can also take part in "l'espérance mystique de l'Ange écarlate". There are perhaps some apocalyptic overtones in this last image. Certainly both Vinteuil and Marcel must go through tremendous emotional upheavals before they can reach the 'eternal morning'; this, indeed, is the message

(81) Weston, Jessie : From Ritual to Romance, p. 182.

implicit in the contrast between the white sonata and the red septet, but, again, neither Vinteuil nor Marcel need fear being found wanting, like Swann, at the final judgement.

Now, with the discussion of colour symbolism, we near the personal, as opposed to the mythological, level of Proust's symbolism. We have already seen that Proust seemed very conscious of the words which form the phonetic components of "l'aubépine" - "l'aube" and "l'épine". The thorn of Marcel's suffering over Albertine, the rose of Balbec, we will discuss in more detail in the rose chapter, but here, we can see more clearly the symbolism of the dawn. The superiority of the second dawn - the one which has survived the storm which still forms the starting point, "un matin d'orage", of the triumphant work of art - must remind us of Proust's first simple attempt to use these symbols, Allégorie. The human landscapes are very similar, in Allégorie and in Proust's final work, a flowery, peaceful landscape is followed by a stormy one, which, after the storm, gains a spiritual dimension. The symbol of the storm we will discuss in greater detail in the lilac section, along with the associated colour symbolism, but it is interesting to note here the precise flowers which Proust associates with the contrasting landscapes; his original attempt, Allégorie, of course greatly lacked precision. We learn that :

Tandis que la Sonate s'ouvrait sur une aube liliale et champêtre, divisant sa candeur légère mais pour se suspendre à l'emmêlement léger et pourtant consistant d'un berceau rustique de chèvrefeuilles sur des géraniums blancs, c'était sur des surfaces unies et planes

comme celles de la mer que, par un matin d'orage, commençait, au milieu d'un aigre silence, dans un vide infini, l'oeuvre nouvelle, et c'est dans un rose d'aurore que, pour se construire progressivement devant moi, cet univers inconnu était tiré du silence et de la nuit.
(P., p. 250).

When Proust talks of 'la candeur' of the Sonata, we realize how overtly he is now associating colours with moral qualities, for 'candour' or frankness, youthful honesty, comes from the Latin 'candor' or 'whiteness'. The lily, of course, is the flower of virginity, but it is also the flower of the annunciation to Mary - and the flower of Christ's resurrection, as we have seen in Marcel's dreams of visiting Florence. The geraniums here are beautiful and peaceful, with the peacefulness of a cradle. However, in Marcel's life, geraniums, associated with the band of young girls, are by no means peaceful flowers. Watching Andrée and Albertine dance together under Cottard's disapproving eye, Marcel is aware of their conspiratorial smile "Et ce rire évoquait aussitôt les roses carnations, les parois parfumées contre lesquelles il semblait qu'il vînt de se frotter et dont, âcre, sensuel et révélateur comme une odeur de géranium, il semblait transporter avec lui quelques particules presque pondérables, irritantes et secrètes" (S. G., p. 795). We have already seen in our discussion of Mlle Vinteuil and the hawthorns and in the incident of the seringa the link between hayfever, pollen, irritating odours, and lesbianism. Yet, later on, Marcel enjoys particularly the remembrance of "la fragrance de géranium" (P., p. 375) evoked by Vinteuil's music as part of "la fête inconnue et colorée" of

his work. It is as though Vinteuil's music witnesses the purification of the scent of the geranium, just as it witnesses the purification of the sensual friendship between Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, as though suffering has been transformed in art. The one person who knows Vinteuil well enough and who has the requisite musical skill finishes publication of his work, and that person turns out to be Mlle Vinteuil's friend. She thus, by the way, vindicates Vinteuil's opinion of her skill and relegates the prevalent Combray snigger that she and Mlle Vinteuil were making beautiful music together to the level of a silly joke. Here we can reuse the quotation which describes "le salaire" that Vinteuil receives from his daughter in a context which makes it evident that his reward is immortality :

Du vivant même du grand musicien, elle avait appris de la fille le culte que celle-ci avait pour son père. C'est à cause de ce culte que, dans ces moments où l'on va à l'opposé de ses inclinations véritables, les deux jeunes filles avaient pu trouver un plaisir dément aux profanations qui ont été racontées. (L'adoration pour son père était la condition même du sacrilège de sa fille ...). Et d'ailleurs, elles étaient allées se raréfiant, jusqu'à disparaître tout à fait, au fur et à mesure que ces relations charnelles et malades, ce trouble et fumeux embrasement avait fait place à la flamme d'une amitié haute et pure. L'amie de Mlle Vinteuil était quelquefois traversée par l'importune pensée qu'elle avait peut-être précipité la mort de Vinteuil. Du moins, en passant des années à débrouiller le grimoire laissé par Vinteuil ... l'amie de Mlle Vinteuil eut la consolation d'assurer au musicien dont elle avait assombri les dernières années une gloire immortelle et compensatrice. (P., pp. 261-262).

Thus, Vinteuil is rewarded twice over for his suffering; for the breadth of experience it brings to his work and for the final publication of his work. Or, in other terms, his daughter's lesbianism has been his purgatory (hence the fire metaphors) and is one step on the way to

heaven, or 'l'éternel matin' offered by artistic immortality. Now we can understand the full impact of the Montjouvain episode, which, in its turn added to our understanding of the white hawthorns. Again, we must note that Swann, unable to stand suffering, never got beyond treating the Sonata as the 'national anthem of his love', and never heard the septet at all.

Perhaps in the passage describing Vinteuil's works, we find the most simple confrontation between innocence and experience, peace versus suffering, white versus red. For once virginity (as in the sonata) is not presented as an illusive, ambiguous, or even disreputable quality - just as part of a natural early stage, a limiting and limited quality for an artist. Marcel has already become bored with the sonata, but the transcendent, joyous quality of the septet still holds endless discoveries for him. He is moving towards that point where he will acknowledge the debt his apprenticeship in letters owes to his own suffering.

However, Marcel still has much to learn. As we have seen in our discussion of the spiral nature of the pattern of this novel, so many hawthorn passages are paired so that they can answer questions posed by previous episodes. If the passage we have just finished discussing ties together the threads of Mlle Vinteuil's association with the white hawthorns and virginity, the passage we will next describe solves finally the mystery of Gilberte's gesture under the pink hawthorns so

many years ago. It also forces Marcel, by a simple metaphor, to question, if not to abandon, certain misconceptions about Combray based on the young Marcel's tendency to see the world in terms of pathways that never meet. Elstir has already taught him that this rarely occurs in the artist's vision, however, to be truly convinced, Marcel needs a personal experience, a demonstration, which Gilberte here provides.

Marcel is much older now; well distanced by years from his childhood Combray, he visits Gilberte, for whom he no longer feels any love. Gilberte is now the owner of Tansonville, and as an attractive hostess, she acts as Marcel's guide on a walk of the surrounding countryside, little realizing that to some extent she is taking over the role her father assumed towards Marcel. We have already discussed the feminine quality of moonlight against the masculine quality of sunlight; thus, Vinteuil's message is couched in tones of joyous sunshine, whilst Gilberte's revelations take place by moonlight, which has the added symbolism of being an ambiguous light. Perhaps because her perspective, starting from Tansonville is a different one to that offered Marcel in his childhood, perhaps because of her undoubted intelligence, Gilberte's usually nocturnal walks introduce Marcel to all sorts of new ideas about his childhood Combray. With her, he discovers that the source of the Vivonne is a rather mean, ugly place, also that there is more than one way to get to Guermantes, and, most surprising of all, that the Guermantes' Way and the Méséglise Way are not at all distinct, each

is accessible by way of the other. Of course, by now, Gilberte herself is a crossroads to Marcel; he says she is like a country which changes hands frequently, with sometimes her father's and sometimes her mother's personality in the ascendancy. Moreover, she is of Tansonville and her husband of Guermantes, provoking Marcel to use the symbol of the crossroads in describing their daughter, as we shall see. And, on one particular moonlit walk, she solves for Marcel the old mystery of her gesture to him under the hawthorns :

Quant à l'intelligence, elle était chez Gilberte, avec quelques absurdités de sa mère, très vive. Mais, ce qui ne tient pas à sa valeur propre, je me rappelle que dans ces conversations que nous avions en nous promenant, plusieurs fois elle m'étonna beaucoup. L'une, la première en me disant ; "Si vous n'aviez pas trop faim et s'il n'était pas si tard, en prenant ce chemin à gauche et en tournant ensuite à droite, en moins d'un quart d'heure nous serions à Guermantes". C'est comme si elle m'avait dit : "Tournez à gauche, prenez ensuite à votre main droite, et vous toucherez l'intangible, vous atteindrez les inattingibles lointains"... Un de mes autres étonnements fut de voir les "sources de la Vivonne", que je me représentais comme quelque chose d'aussi extra-terrestre que l'Entrée des Enfers, et qui n'étaient qu'une espèce de lavoir carré où montaient des bulles. Et la troisième fois fut quand Gilberte me dit ; "Si vous voulez, nous pourrions ... alors aller à Guermantes, en prenant par Méséglise ...", phrase qui en bouleversant toutes les idées de mon enfance m'apprit que les deux côtés n'étaient pas aussi inconciliables que j'avais cru ... Mais quand elle vérifia pour moi des imaginations que j'avais eues du côté de Méséglise, ce fut pendant une de ces promenades en somme nocturnes bien qu'elles eussent lieu avant le dîner - mais elle dînait si tard ! Au moment de descendre dans le mystère d'une vallée parfaite et profonde que tapissait le clair de lune, nous nous arrê tâmes un instant, comme deux insectes qui vont s'enfoncer au coeur d'un calice bleuâtre ... Epanchant brusquement sur elle la tendresse dont j'étais rempli par l'air délicieux, la brise qu'on respirait, je lui dis : "Vous parliez l'autre jour du raidillon. Comme je vous aimais alors !" Elle me répondit : "Pourquoi ne me le disiez-vous pas ? je ne m'en étais pas doutée. Moi je vous aimais. Et même deux fois je me suis jetée à votre tête. - Quand donc ? - La première fois à Tansonville, vous vous promeniez avec votre famille, je rentrais,

je n'avais jamais connu un aussi joli petit garçon. J'avais l'habitude, ajouta-t-elle d'un air vague et pudique, d'aller jouer avec de petits amis, dans les ruines du donjon de Roussainville. Et vous me direz que j'étais bien mal élevée, car il y avait là dedans des filles et des garçons de tout genre qui profitaient de l'obscurité. L'enfant de chœur de l'église de Combray, Théodore qui, il faut l'avouer, était bien gentil (Dieu qu'il était bien!) et qui est devenu très laid ... s'y amusait avec toutes les petites paysannes du voisinage. Comme on me laissait sortir seule, dès que je pouvais m'échapper j'y courais. Je ne peux pas vous dire comme j'aurais voulu vous y voir venir; je me rappelle très bien que, n'ayant qu'une minute pour vous faire comprendre ce que je désirais, au risque d'être vue par vos parents et les miens, je vous l'ai indiqué d'une façon tellement crue que j'en ai honte maintenant. Mais vous m'avez regardée d'une façon si méchante que j'ai compris que vous ne vouliez pas".

Et tout d'un coup, je me dis que la vraie Gilberte, la vraie Albertine, c'étaient peut-être celles qui s'étaient au premier instant livrées dans leur regard, l'une devant la haie d'épines roses, l'autre sur la plage. Et c'était moi qui, n'ayant pas su le comprendre, ne l'ayant repris que plus tard dans ma mémoire, après un intervalle où par mes conversations tout un entre-deux de sentiment leur avait fait craindre d'être aussi franches que dans la première minute, avais tout gâté par ma maladresse. (T. R., pp. 692-4).

Note that Marcel's preconceptions of Combray are couched in mythological or epic terms; Marcel is sorry to say good-bye to "les inattingibles lointains" (T. R., p. 693) of the different walks; he is unhappy that the source of the Vivonne, which ought to be "quelque chose d'aussi extra-terrestre que l'Entrée des Enfers" is only "une espèce de lavoir carré". "Mais ce qui me frappa le plus, ce fut combien peu, pendant ce séjour, je revécus mes années d'autrefois, désirai peu revoir Combray, trouvai mince et laide la Vivonne". Here, indeed, we have proof that Marcel has lost his childhood beliefs and recognized his childhood errors. For this is the Combray that used to have a weekly routine which resembled "un cycle légendaire" for anyone who had, as Marcel

obviously did, "la tête épique" (C. S., p. 110). It was he who lent to Françoise's rigidity the dignity of "un code impérieux" (C. S., p. 28), he who filled the Combray church with its crude stained glass windows with the romance of "une nuit mérovingienne" (C. S., p. 61), and he who regarded the Swanns as godlike creatures. Thus, the passage which we have just quoted in full is particularly ironic. There are certainly mythological overtones in the sentence "Au moment de descendre dans le mystère d'une vallée parfaite et profonde ...". We can recognize the blue flower, which was the goal of Heinrich von Ofterdingen ⁽⁸¹⁾; the valley is full of mystery, is like "un calice bleuâtre" - and, given the context of the passage in amongst a catalogue of Marcel's past beliefs, we even wonder if the word 'un calice' is supposed to remind us, in its other meaning, of another quest, that for the chalice, or grail. In fact, the more myths we see allusions to, the more ironic it is that Marcel and Gilberte are reduced in metaphorical terms, to the size of insects, crawling into the profound and perfect valley of a flower's calyx. The metaphor must remind us of the perhaps rather ridiculous courtship of Charlus and Jupien. The ridiculous side of the love Marcel and Gilberte felt for each other comes from the fact that their feelings never coincided, or if they did, the would-be lovers still succeeded in totally misunderstanding each other, only recognizing their emotions when they were long past. Still, at least Marcel is no longer just an onlooker, watching the fertilization of orchid by bee in the meeting of Jupien and Charlus, or the mating dance of two birds

(81) Viers, Rina : La Signification des Fleurs dans l'Oeuvre de Marcel Proust, p. 157.

in the antics of Mlle Vinteuil and her friend. For once he is involved in a scheme much larger than himself. Echoes of the old beliefs still remain. Instead of hawthorn damsels singing in church choirs, we find the randy young Théodore, choirboy, playing his games with Gilberte in the dungeons of Roussainville. And Gilberte was herself more than willing to act out with Marcel his own fantasies of love in the ruins and forests of Roussainville; but to the young Marcel a snobbish imagination suggested that such things would only happen with peasant girls, and Gilberte, of course, is more of a princess. Gilberte continues her story of how she threw herself at Marcel's head, and this time, we definitely feel overtones of the Orpheus myth. The incident, by the way, is the one in which Marcel fails to recognize Gilberte because of her change of name :

Et la seconde fois, reprit Gilberte, c'est, bien des années après, quand je vous ai rencontré sous votre porte, la veille du jour où je vous ai retrouvé chez ma tante Oriane; je ne vous ai pas reconnu tout de suite, ou plutôt je vous reconnaissais sans le savoir puisque j'avais la même envie qu'à Tansonville. - Dans l'intervalle il y avait eu pourtant les Champs-Élysées. - Oui, mais là vous m'aimiez trop, je sentais une inquisition sur tout ce que je faisais. (Orpheus too lost his beloved by confronting her). Je ne pensais pas à lui demander quel était ce jeune homme avec lequel elle descendait l'avenue des Champs-Élysées, le jour où j'étais parti pour la revoir, où je me fusse réconcilié avec elle pendant qu'il en était temps encore, ce jour qui aurait peut-être changé toute ma vie si je n'avais rencontré les deux ombres s'avançant côté à côté dans le crépuscule ... Et en effet les femmes qu'on n'aime plus et qu'on rencontre après des années, n'y a-t-il pas entre elles et vous la mort, tout aussi bien que si elles n'étaient plus de ce monde, puisque le fait que notre amour n'existe plus fait de celles qu'elles étaient alors, ou de celui que nous étions, des morts? (T. R., p. 694-5).

However, Marcel does ask Gilberte who the man was on that evening long ago, and she says it was Léa dressed up as a man, and she adds that Albertine knew Léa. Thus, Gilberte not only shows Marcel the way in which the two sides of Combray are joined, she also shows him the way in which his two loves, herself and Albertine, touched lives through Léa. And, as we shall see later, Marcel considers her daughter (with a Guermantes for father) to be a living 'crossroads' between the two ways.

The crossroads, to Proust, is a symbol of ambiguity or mixed elements, often sexual, as in his story of the homosexual who marries a beautiful woman, but who cannot resist resuming his affair with a former male friend at a crossroads which used to be their meeting place (S. G., p. 624). Only when Marcel becomes sure of himself and his vocation will he truly recognize which paths join in his life, which elements intermingle. Here, he finds Gilberte a puzzling mixture of her father (Swann) and her mother (Odette); he is not even curious enough to question the real nature of Léa. And he is left regretting not so much the loss of his beliefs, but all the things he never experienced because of them :

Je revis Gilberte dans ma mémoire. J'aurais pu dessiner le quadrilatère de lumière que le soleil faisait sous les aubépines, la bêche que la petite fille tenait à la main, le long regard qui s'attacha à moi. Seulement, j'avais cru, à cause du geste grossier dont il était accompagné, que c'était un regard de mépris parce que ce que je souhaitais me paraissait quelque chose que les petites filles ne connaissaient pas et ne faisaient que dans mon imagination, pendant mes heures de désir solitaire ... J'eus un sursaut de désir et de regret en pensant aux souterrains de Roussainville.
(T. R., p. 696).

From those dead memories, Marcel progresses to a more positive confrontation, or meeting, of the qualities of the white and pink hawthorns represented - innocence and experience, youth and maturity, time unformed and colourless, time pregnant with the past, creative and red as the promise of Vinteuil's scarlet dawn - all to be found at the Guermantes' last matinée. In fact, so much of Marcel's past is evoked by one of his 'moments out of time' which he experiences just before the matinée, and by the people that he meets there, that he does seem to resemble a dying man whose life flashes before his eyes at the instant of death. With Marcel, of course, there will be a resurrection through art. Here, however, we meet again, rising from the depth of Marcel's memory, the incident of the tea and madeleine, and that of the duchess' red shoes, the moment out of time in Venice, the debt Marcel feels towards Swann, and the even greater debt towards Vinteuil's septet - "L'appel rouge et mystérieux de ce septuor que Swann n'avait pu connaître" (T. R., p. 878), even the debt towards Albertine for the strength the suffering she caused finally gives him. We meet the red flowers resurrected in Marcel's mind by the sight of the duchess, and, one of his oldest friends, the book François le Champi, here a part of the prince's library, reminiscent of the fascinating red-bound copy which Marcel loved so in his childhood, associated forever in his mind with that first loss of innocence on the evening his nervous illness forced his mother to spend the night with him. All these allusions to often bitter experience associated with the colour red (as we shall see in various coming chapters) form a striking contrast to the dead white

scene, the 'winter forest', which greets Marcel when he finally joins the guests at the party. Many of them have lived so shallowly that they have scarcely lost their youth. Marcel, too, likes to think of himself as still a young man, but he has suffered a great deal from his grandmother's death, his unhappy love affair with Albertine and his own lengthy illness. Thus, like the others, he is tempted to recapture his lost youth. Two ways are open to him; he can attempt to live as he did as a lad, having affairs with young women and imbibing from them some of their youthfulness (as he tried to slake his thirst for youth and health with the fishergirls and "les jeunes filles en fleurs" at Balbec) or he can write a book which will recapture the past. In terms of the quest, this is Marcel's final trial, his last temptation, and, knowing the consistency of Proust's imagery, we are not surprised when the choice is presented in terms of colour symbolism - red and white - and in the image of the crossroads, which acts not only as a symbol of the ultimate unity of things, but also of the necessity of making a true decision in the problems posed by the quest.

All through this final section, Marcel comes to terms with his former fear of time, the destroyer of youth, the decayer of flowers. As usual narcissistic (as we have seen in so many Hawthorne passages), Marcel sees himself in the eyes of others, but this time the image they reflect back at him shows that he has been deluding himself; he, like them, is no longer young. "Et je pus me voir, comme dans la première glace véridique que j'eusse rencontrée, dans les yeux de vieillards, restés

jeunes à leur avis, comme je le croyais moi-même de moi" (T. R., p. 930). And his friends are certainly not immune to time, as "le paysage humain de cette matinée" (T. R., p. 926) shows him. "Les parties de blancheur de barbes jusque-là entièrement noires rendaient mélancolique le paysage humain de cette matinée, comme les premières feuilles jaunes des arbres alors qu'on croyait encore pouvoir compter sur un long été, et qu'avant d'avoir commencé d'en profiter on voit que c'est déjà l'automne". How strange it seems that white, connected with youth and innocence is now connected with old age; not so strange, however, when we realize that both the young and the old people of whom Marcel speaks lack the maturity that experience brings, the latter having rejected time's lessons. Ski is an example, a failed artist :

En plusieurs, je finissais par reconnaître, non seulement eux-mêmes, mais eux tels qu'ils étaient autrefois, et par exemple Ski pas plus modifié qu'une fleur ou un fruit qui a séché. Il était un essai informe, confirmant mes théories sur l'art ... D'autres n'étaient nullement des amateurs, étaient des gens du monde. Mais eux aussi, la vieillesse ne les avait pas mûris ... Ils n'étaient pas des vieillards, mais des jeunes gens de dix-huit ans extrêmement fanés.
(T. R., p. 936).

Yet the cycle goes on, even in society. New members take over from old.:

Ainsi, à tous les moments de sa durée, le nom de Guermantes, considéré comme un ensemble de tous les noms qu'il admettait en lui, autour de lui subissait des déperditions, recrutait des éléments nouveaux, comme ces jardins où à tout moment, des fleurs à peine en bouton, et se préparant à remplacer celles qui se flétrissent déjà, se confondent dans une masse.
(T. R., p. 970).

In fact, since everything seems to be turning full circle, whilst Marcel is remembering with great clarity 'cette signification primitive'

that various people had for him, so that "Mlle Swann me jetait, de l'autre côté de la haie d'épines roses" (T. R., p. 971) her famous glance once again, a glance now seen in its true light instead of through a haze of childhood beliefs; whilst Marcel is reviewing, then, some of the incidents of 'son âge de croyance', he is also quite aware that his role of young worshipper has probably been taken over by another :

Au temps où je croyais, même si je savais le contraire, que les Guermantes habitaient tel palais en vertu d'un droit héréditaire, pénétrer dans le palais du sorcier ou de la fée, faire s'ouvrir devant moi les portes qui ne cèdent pas tant qu'on n'a pas prononcé la formule magique, me semblait aussi malaisé que d'obtenir un entretien du sorcier ou de la fée eux-mêmes ... quelque jeune collégien bourgeois devait en ce moment avoir devant l'hôtel de l'avenue du Bois (which is new, and not at all an ancient holding of the Guermantes) les mêmes sentiments que moi jadis devant l'ancien hôtel du prince de Guermantes. C'est qu'il était encore à l'âge des croyances, mais je l'avais dépassé
(T. R., pp. 857-858).

But, although the prince "avait encore en recevant cet air bonhomme d'un roi de féerie ... il s'était affublé d'une barbe blanche ... Ses moustaches étaient blanches aussi, comme s'il restait après elles le gel de la forêt du Petit Pouce" (T. R., p. 920). Even the allusions to fairy tales mark the passage of time. "Alors la vie nous apparaît comme la féerie où on voit d'acte en acte le bébé devenir adolescent, homme mûr et se courber vers la tombe" (T. R., p. 926).

It is just as well that Marcel is confronted with so many incidents that point out the necessity for accepting the passing of time, indeed the impossibility of ignoring it, for the matinée presents him with a

final temptation, a final choice of two ways, embodied in Gilberte's daughter. We have already discussed the image of the crossroads as a meeting-place of seemingly divergent ways. Marcel recognizes in Gilberte's daughter even before he meets her a sort of human crossroads. For in her the Guermantes' Way and Swann's Way are finally united, or, to use the imagery of the novel as a whole and this last section in particular, she is at the centre of the human landscapes of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, at the convergence of all the roads in the winter forest :

Comme la plupart des êtres, d'ailleurs, n'était-elle pas comme sont dans les forêts les "étoiles" des carrefours où viennent converger des routes venues, pour notre vie aussi, des points les plus différents? Elles étaient nombreuses pour moi, celles qui aboutissaient à Mlle de Saint-Loup et qui rayonnaient autour d'elle. Et avant tout venaient aboutir à elle les deux grands "côtés" où j'avais fait tant de promenades et de rêves - par son père Robert de Saint-Loup le côté de Guermantes, par Gilberte sa mère le côté de Méséglise qui était le "côté de chez Swann". L'une, par la mère de la jeune fille et les Champs-Élysées, me menait jusqu'à Swann, à mes soirs de Combray, au côté de Méséglise; l'autre, par son père, à mes après-midi de Balbec où je le revoyais près de la mer ensoleillée.
(T. R., p. 1029).

But we have already seen that crossroads in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu can even offer a choice of roads on an emotional or moral level. And Gilberte's daughter does present him with a temptation, a decision to make, a choice between two ways of treating time - as an enemy to be thwarted in its attempt to rob one of one's youth, or as the bestower of maturity, the subject matter of his novel and the inspiration to creativity. Gilberte's daughter is "une jeune fille d'environ seize ans ... Le temps incolore et insaisissable s'était ... matérialisé en

elle, il l'avait pétrie comme un chef-d'oeuvre, tandis que parallèlement sur moi, hélas! il n'avait fait que son oeuvre ... Je la trouvais bien belle : pleine encore d'espérances, riante, formée des années mêmes que j'avais perdues, elle ressemblait à ma Jeunesse" (T. R., p. 1031,2).

There is much to occupy us in this quotation. Once again, Marcel has identified himself with a young female character, this time as an image of his lost youth. Even the fact that he describes her as "un chef-d'oeuvre" shows a certain self-awareness, for it is no doubt a reference to his tendency towards idolatry as well as his habit of seeing life in terms of art. He is already aware of his danger. As he says :

Comme Elstir aimait à voir incarnée devant lui, dans sa femme, la beauté vénitienne, qu'il avait souvent peinte dans ses oeuvres, je me donnais l'excuse d'être attiré par un certain égoïsme esthétique vers les belles femmes qui pouvaient me causer de la souffrance, et j'avais un certain sentiment d'idolâtrie pour les futures Gilberte, les futures duchesses de Guermantes, les futures Albertine que je pourrais rencontrer, et qui, me semblait-il, pourraient m'inspirer, comme un sculpteur qui se promène au milieu de beaux marbres antiques.
(T. R., p. 988).

However, most of all, it is Gilberte's daughter's youth he covets - time lost, uncoloured time. And, he may even have succumbed to the temptation to relive his youth through love affairs with youngsters such as Mlle de Saint-Loup (he considers asking Gilberte to introduce him to young girls), had he not met the alternative way already, as symbolized by another female who carries on other, as ancient, hereditary lines as those of the Guermantes and who, in contrast to the as yet rather colourless Mlle de Saint-Loup, wears red. In the midst of the Guermantes' 'winter forest', whitened by the snowy beards of the older

guests, in the midst of "le salon de la princesse de Guermantes ... (the former Mme Verdurin) oublieux et fleuri, (one of the human flowers is Odette who seems like "une rose stérilisée (T. R., p. 950)) comme un paisible cimetière" (T. R., p. 949), the lady in red has carefully set the scene for herself, so that Marcel sees in her a promise of new life and of a triumph over time which, if she does not fulfil , he will :

Dans des salons plus petits on trouvait des intimes qui pour écouter la musique avaient préféré s'isoler. Dans un petit salon Empire, où quelques rares habits noirs écoutaient assis sur un canapé, on voyait à côté d'une psyché supportée par une Minerve une chaise longue, placée de façon rectiligne, mais à l'intérieur incurvée comme un berceau, et où une jeune femme était étendue. La mollesse de sa pose, que l'entrée de la duchesse ne lui fit même pas déranger, contrastait avec l'éclat merveilleux de sa robe Empire en une soierie nacarat devant laquelle les plus rouges fuchsias eussent pâli et sur le tissu nacré de laquelle des insignes et des fleurs semblaient avoir été enfoncés longtemps ... En réponse à ma demande, la duchesse de Guermantes me dit que c'était Mme de Saint-Euverte. Alors je voulus savoir ce qu'elle était à la madame de Saint-Euverte que j'avais connue. Mme de Guermantes me dit que c'était la femme d'un de ses petits-neveux, parut supporter l'idée qu'elle était née La Rochefoucauld, mais nia avoir elle-même connu des Saint-Euverte. Je lui rappelai la soirée (que je n'avais sue, il est vrai, que par ouï-dire) où, princesse des Laumes, elle avait retrouvé Swann. Mme de Guermantes affirma n'avoir jamais été à cette soirée. La duchesse avait toujours été un peu menteuse ... Mme de Saint-Euverte était pour elle un salon - d'ailleurs assez tombé avec le temps - qu'elle aimait à renier ... Quant à la nièce, j'ignore si c'est à cause d'une maladie d'estomac, de nerfs, d'une phlébite, d'un accouchement prochain, récent ou manqué, qu'elle écoutait la musique étendue sans se bouger pour personne. Le plus probable est que, fière de ses belles soies rouges, elle pensait faire sur sa chaise longue un effet genre Récamier. Elle ne se rendait pas compte qu'elle donnait pour moi la naissance à un nouvel épanouissement de ce nom Saint-Euverte, qui, à tant d'intervalle, marquait la distance et la continuité du Temps. C'est le Temps qu'elle berçait dans cette nacelle où fleurissaient le nom de Saint-Euverte et le style Empire en soies de fuchsias rouges (T. R., p. 1024-1025).

So many details point out the importance of this scene, presided over by Psyche, the personification of the human soul, and Minerva, the goddess of wisdom. Although the young Mme de Saint-Euverte has obviously arranged herself to be the focus of attraction of the whole scene, Marcel takes over the tableau as a tribute not to the beautiful young woman in red, but to the fruitfulness of the cradle of Time. Mme de Saint-Euverte symbolizes the passing of time, in that she replaces the older Mme de Saint-Euverte and she represents the reflowering of an even older name, La Rochefoucauld. In fact, Marcel has already experienced the way in which social hierarchies change with time. On the way to this matinée, he has noticed the now aged and infirm M. de Charlus saluting most humbly the old Mme de Saint-Euverte, whose name used to be the butt of his famous 'Guermites' wit'. The name Saint-Euverte, automatically reminds Marcel of Swann, for it was at the last soirée of Mme de Saint-Euverte's that he chose the wrong road, the road leading away from art. His last social function, then, was a soirée, whilst Marcel's is a matinée. The social landscape of this party reminded Swann of a picture of the Day of Judgement, whilst Marcel is confronted with a scene which he chooses to regard as a possible representation of the creativity offered by Time. Swann never heard Vinteuil's 'red' septet and paid scant attention to the sonata played at Mme de Saint-Euverte's. His last real exchange with the Duchess of Guermites (here Marcel's 'guide', too) concerned the way in which her headdress resembled a frozen hawthorn, scarcely a good omen. And here, besides, she denies seeing Swann at the party. How

much more fortunate is Marcel with his vision of a young woman dressed in red imprinted with flowers, a harbinger of a new social era and of the gift of creativity that Marcel himself can expect from Time. Marcel, however, is careful to establish his superiority to this woman and to the other folk listening to the music. He realizes that they are listening, not, as the young man thinks, to Ravel but to the Kreutzer sonata. A certain ironic twist on Proust's usual association of suffering, the colour red, the image of the cross (or at least the crown of thorns) and music can be seen in his description of, to them, "le supplice d'écouter 'religieusement' le Sonate à Kreutzer" (T. R., p. 1026). Then, too, Marcel is careful to point out that, although Mme de Saint-Euverte may be pregnant, her reclining position may, on the other hand be due to vanity, illness, or even a failed pregnancy, such are the uncertainties of physical reproduction or creativity. The idea of pregnancy once introduced, Marcel borrows it himself. Mme de Saint-Euverte comes to represent for him the second choice offered to him at this party (the first being to relive his youth through Gilberte's daughter) - that of a creative role made possible by accepting time and using it as a cradle for a new life - in her case, probably, a child, in his case, his novel, no less a child for him. "Elle (his work of art) était pour moi comme un fils dont la mère mourante (himself) doit encore s'imposer la fatigue de s'occuper sans cesse" (T. R., pp. 1041-1042). Accepting birth, new life, and time also means accepting death, even, to some extent in art, although there is, here, a hope of eternal life :

Moi je dis que la loi cruelle de l'art est que les êtres meurent et que nous-même mourions en épuisant toutes les souffrances, pour que pousse l'herbe non de l'oubli mais de la vie éternelle, l'herbe drue des oeuvres fécondes, sur laquelle les générations viendront faire gaiement, sans souci de ceux qui dorment en dessous, leur "déjeuner sur l'herbe" (T. R., p. 1038).

Once again, Marcel alludes to painting. However, both his choices are offered by women - Gilberte's daughter and Mme de Saint-Euverte. The latter seems to represent an image of birth, but Proust also thought of death as a woman (T. R., p. 1042). But, then, Marcel frequently seems close to such women as Mlle Vinteuil or Andrée, and does not worry about taking on a role which he considers feminine.

In any case, Marcel has, we feel, looking back at previous hawthorn passages which often describe the flowers and people associated with them as on an aesthetic level, Marcel has already made his choice between life and art. Even on a literal level, on the pathway at Tansonville, "le raidillon aux aubépines" (T. R., p. 756) he chose the more 'mature' pink hawthorns over the youthful white, because there was more to them; more sensual associations, a tinge of blood colouring, the misunderstood glimpse of a young red-head between their branches, and thus, eventually, more suffering and more joy, as seen in Vinteuil's septet, rosier and closer to perfection than his pale sonata. Marcel needs no longer feel frustration at being unable to understand the hawthorns because he cannot conceive a framework to hold them. Indeed, by the end of the book, they belong to an almost overwhelming number of frameworks - through Gilberte and her daughter and the temptations

they offer they are an important part of Marcel's quest; then, if Gilberte is something of a pink hawthorn maiden, the septet is a pink hawthorn of music, a tribute to martyrdom and resurrection, the two being neatly joined by the person of Mlle Vinteuil's friend. Even on a very earthly level, the hawthorn trail has earned a significance, as Gilberte, now owner of Tansonville, tells Marcel :

La bataille de Méséglise a duré plus de huit mois, les Allemands y ont perdu plus de six cent mille hommes, ils ont détruit Méséglise, mais ils ne l'ont pas pris. Le petit chemin que vous aimiez tant, que nous appelions le raidillon aux aubépines et où vous prétendez que vous êtes tombé dans votre enfance amoureux de moi, alors que je vous assure en toute vérité que c'était moi qui étais amoureuse de vous, je ne peux pas vous dire l'importance qu'il a prise. L'immense champ de blé auquel il aboutit, c'est la fameuse cote 307 dont vous avez dû voir le nom revenir si souvent dans les communiqués (T. R., p. 756).

Marcel knows how time will treat the men lost in the fight over his hill; they will be forgotten. But he has a far more lasting framework to offer not only to the hawthorns, but also to the characters associated with them, who will live on in his book. The hawthorns are one of those things perhaps unimportant in themselves, but rendered very significant by virtue of the work of art they inspire, as the song of a bird was to Chateaubriand's Mémoires d'Outre-tombe :

Tout en bas, les purs sots, les purs gens de plaisir, ne s'occupaient pas qu'il y eût la guerre. Mais tout en haut, ceux qui se sont fait une vie intérieure ambiante ont peu égard à l'importance des événements. Ce qui modifie profondément pour eux l'ordre des pensées, c'est bien plutôt quelque chose qui semble en soi n'avoir aucune importance et qui renverse pour eux l'ordre du temps en les faisant contemporains d'un autre temps de leur vie. On peut s'en rendre compte pratiquement à la beauté des pages qu'il inspire : un chant d'oiseau dans le parc

de Montboissier, ou une brise chargée de l'odeur de réséda, sont évidemment des événements de moindre conséquence que les plus grandes dates de la Révolution et de l'Empire. Ils ont cependant inspiré à Chateaubriand, dans les Mémoires d'Outre-tombe, des pages d'une valeur infiniment plus grande. (T. R., p. 728).

Marcel's inspiration, similarly, comes from the hawthorns, themselves associated with a pathway which offers difficult choices. He has come a long way from the humble Combray hill to a further 'internal countryside' which he describes thus :

L'esprit a ses paysages dont la contemplation ne lui est laissée qu'un temps. J'avais vécu comme un peintre montant un chemin qui surplombe un lac dont un rideau de rochers et d'arbres lui cache la vue. Par une brèche il l'aperçoit, il l'a tout entier devant lui, il prend ses pinceaux. Mais déjà vient la nuit où l'on ne peut plus peindre, et sur laquelle le jour ne se relève pas. (T. R., p. 1035).

This spiritual landscape has many elements in common with the real landscapes in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, especially the hawthorn ones; always there is a body of water, adding mystery, reflecting Marcel's own face, whether it is a pond in Tansonville park or the sea; usually a pathway is mentioned, with the concomitant danger of straying from the path; the trees are there, too, the hawthorn bushes or Roussainville forest trees in real life. Marcel always sees the landscape in aesthetic terms - here, as a painter. However, in truth, this moral landscape is a landscape in time, a description in pictorial terms of Marcel's quest. The trees could so easily be the old friends who make up the Guermentes' winter forest. They signpost the crossroads and offer the choice of ways :

Plus d'une des personnes que cette matinée réunissait ou dont elle m'évoquait le souvenir, me donnait les aspects qu'elle avait tour à tour présentés pour moi ... comme un accident de terrain, colline ou château ... semble d'abord dominer une forêt, ensuite sortir d'une vallée, et révèle ainsi au voyageur des changements d'orientation et des différences d'altitude dans la route qu'il suit.
(T. R., p. 970).

Nor does Marcel need a fortress of Roussainville and its dungeons in this winter forest, which has its own symbolic prison; "Le corps enferme l'esprit dans une forteresse" (T. R., p. 1035), claims Marcel, who has so frequently associated love (or at least sex) with dungeons and imprisonment and death. But art is a pathway leading upwards, towards the spiritual and also towards true objectivity, as long as one can somehow manage to pass all the trials on the way. "l'art est ce qu'il y a de plus réel, la plus austère école de la vie, est le vrai Jugement dernier" (T. R., p. 880). Swann heard the 'trumpets of the day of judgement' at his last soirée, but failed the test. Here, Marcel, too, hears the last trump :

leur vieillesse (that of the old friends making up the winter forest) me désolait en m'avertissant des approches de la mienne. Celles-ci me furent, du reste, proclamées coup sur coup par des paroles qui ... vinrent me frapper comme les trompettes du Jugement. La première fut prononcée par la duchesse de Guermantes ... "Ah! quelle joie de vous voir, vous mon plus vieil ami".
(T. R., p. 927).

Thus, another parallel between Swann's and Marcel's quests is found in the person who warns both of them of approaching winter, the duchess. Poor Swann, lost in his idolatry of Odette, cannot respond to the sonata. Marcel, infinitely more rich in knowing and in understanding "l'appel rouge et mystérieux de ce septuor" (T. R., p. 878) is able to

choose the right way in the classic knightly trial at the crossroads, and overcome his idolatry for youth, as symbolized in Swann's granddaughter. But then, Marcel has always chosen, if only subconsciously in his childhood predilection for the pink hawthorn, the difficult path to maturity. Here, he finally sees the absurdity of a virginity arising from a creative lack. "des célibataires de l'Art! Ils ont les chagrins qu'ont les vierges et les paresseux, et que la fécondité ou le travail guérirait" (T. R., p. 892). Actually, Marcel does seem to go to the other extreme, embracing suffering for its own sake. "Ma grand'mère que j'avais, avec tant d'indifférence, vue agoniser et mourir près de moi! O puissé-je, en expiation, quand mon oeuvre serait terminée, blessé sans remède, souffrir de longues heures, abandonné de tous, avant de mourir!" (T. R., p. 902). Partly, Marcel is identifying himself with his grandmother (or mother, as the two merge in the novel), for, as we have seen, he talks of his book as a son who causes him great pain whilst he is slowly dying. And partly, he is taking on the hero's or god's burden. In any case, he is ascending towards a more spiritual plane, and can expect, like Bergotte with his books like resurrection angels, some kind of eternal life from his works of art. Already, he can appreciate 'metaphors' in nature, when life brings together two entities separated by time, but united by a common quality which they share, leading to "ces résurrections du passé" (T. R., p. 875) such as the one which so filled Marcel with hope at the beginning of the matinée. Marcel, however, may not have

a total belief in the promise of Vinteuil's eternal morning vanquishing the night which begins to obscure the view in his spiritual landscape. Although he does talk of "la vie éternelle, l'herbe drue des oeuvres" (T. R., p. 1038), he also comments, "Sans doute mes livres eux aussi, comme mon être de chair, finiraient un jour par mourir. Mais il faut se résigner à mourir ... La durée éternelle n'est pas plus promise aux oeuvres qu'aux hommes" (T. R., p. 1043). And thus we find Marcel, at the end of the quest at a good vantage point on his spiritual hill, but, being a modern hero, not at all sure that he will be gathered up to heaven, to eternal life as were the grail knights. But he is satisfied, as, for him, "les vrais paradis sont les paradis qu'on a perdus" (T. R., p. 870), and the only way to recapture them is to recreate them in a book. Thus the artist conquers time, though Proust the realist feels that time may yet prove the final victor, until another artist again takes up the fight. The pattern of the quest in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, then, even in its celebration of the victory of one artist is the comic pattern of nature, of individuals dying, but life itself being resurrected in the spring. This cycle we have seen, was probably at the origin of the grail myth and is certainly in keeping with the main symbols of the hawthorns. Still, with any luck, Proust's quite justified pessimism may prove false and generations of readers, granting a long life to the human race as a whole, may continue to enjoy, in season and out, the colour, the scent and the symbolism of Proust's own hawthorns.

This last section of the novel, then, certainly makes nonsense of the criticism that Proust wrote his book haphazardly, with no central plan. Looking at the number of patterns in which the hawthorn is involved, and which all come to a conclusion in the description of the Guermites' last reception, we must agree, instead, with André Gide that Proust's work has a very obvious 'scaffolding'. "L'architecture, chez Proust, est très belle; mais il advient souvent, comme il n'enlève rien de l'échafaudage, que celui-ci prenne plus d'importance que le monument même, dont le regard, sans cesse distrait par le détail, ne parvient plus à saisir l'ensemble" (82). We must add, however, that, obscuring scaffolding or not, Gide did not in any case base this comment on the novel as a whole, but only on A l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs.

If the 'scaffolding' of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu is obvious anywhere, it is in the final section which we have just finished studying, and which Proust wrote quite consciously as a résumé, a resolution, of all his themes, at the same time as he wrote the beginning of his novel (as we have already mentioned in the introduction). He mentions many of the important flowers and related symbols again - the forget-me-nots (T. R., p. 751), the rose (T. R., p. 950, 987), the red and violet flowers (T. R., p. 990), the pollen filled town garden of Mme de Guermites (and, by association, the orchid) (T. R., p. 1004), the tilleul (T. R., p. 873), the symbol of the storm (T. R., p. 897), and of the fish (T. R., p. 927). But, apart from mentioning the

(82) Gide, André : Journal, p. 1322.

hawthorns three times (T. R., pp. 756, 971, 991), Proust also brings to their conclusions most of the themes or symbolic patterns associated with these flowers, thus affording us the opportunity of reviewing these patterns (although we might add that most of them are inter-related, so that the theme of the quest and the journey from innocence to experience are almost the same, and both, in their development, owe a great deal to Proust's private colour symbolism, especially since it fits in so well with traditional symbolism). To begin with the theme of the quest, with which we introduced the hawthorns, we note that Marcel has gone through all the stages of the young knight of the legends, and that this final section not only represents the conclusion of the quest, but also retains and repeats some of the traditional quest symbolism. Marcel starts his 'apprenticeship as a man of letters' enjoying the idea of the fresh young girls suggested by the white hawthorns on the Combray altar. Later, he is attracted to Gilberte through the hedge of rose hawthorns, slightly tinged with red, the colour of love, so that the chalice or calyx holds a suggestion of blood in its centre. But, not understanding the nature of the temptation, nor the opportunities, offered him, he contents himself with a melodramatic farewell and a vow of constancy to the hawthorns as he sees them - coquettish, pious young maidens in the Combray church of his youth. Thus, when he goes to Balbec and comes across a flowerless bush, never having sought out the hawthorns in their season as he promised, he is not at all dismayed, and furnishes creatures from his mind, backed up by Combray memories. But, in quest terms, he has lost sight of the

chalice. He is, however, by now a competent fisherman (again echoes of the Parsifal legend) and is no longer willing to nibble at a hook left out (as was Gilberte's) but is interested himself in actually catching a girl. Later, he is caught up in the wiles of society - a Parsifal amongst the flower maidens - and, when he returns to Balbec on a second trip, Albertine one of "les jeunes filles en fleurs" is his mistress, and he associates the hawthorns with the perhaps pious, obviously coquettish, Bloch sisters, who serve to reintroduce the theme of lesbianism into the novel. At the darkest part of his life, Marcel hears Vinteuil's septet, presaged by the pink hawthorn and celebrating the joyous triumph of Art over suffering. At the Guermantes' matinée, Marcel overcomes the temptation towards idolatry, finds his way at the crossroads of the winter forest, and climbs the hill (presaged by the hawthorn hill) towards the perspective needed by any artist. To confirm that his quest is at a close, he sees the Duchess of Guermantes resembling a sacred fish, for all the world as though she were reminding us of the Celtic lore of the salmon of knowledge which we shall mention in more detail in the chapter on the red and white flowers. And on her cheeks (much maligned in the past by Marcel), he finds a trace of verdigris, smaller than the mistletoe, which is the emblem of the religion out of which the quest legend may have sprung (T. R., p. 937). The hawthorn flowers, with their chalice, are there too, if only in memory. Marcel has come a long way from his first confrontation with 'virginity'; in the description of the Combray church, linked with the worship of the Virgin Mary, he first worships an ideal, despite the fact

that the virgin Mlle Vinteuil there introduced is going to pose many problems in his own and her father's life. By the time he goes to Balbec, he associates virginity with a mystery of more earthly than unearthly origin; and he hates to destroy the one by destroying the other. But a new aspect of virginity is beginning to reveal itself, that of young girls who will never know men because they are lesbians; hence the phrase "les jeunes filles en fleurs", so close to Baudelaire's term for lesbians, and the final association with the hawthorn maidens through Bloch's sisters. Even later, with more self-knowledge and Albertine not just as a mistress, but as a positive prisoner, Marcel makes the statement that doubt and jealousy and not knowing one's lover's intentions can return a sort of virginity to one's love (P., p. 349). At the Guermantes' reception, however, the only 'virginity' that he truly notices is entirely negative, an artistic virginity or infertility resulting from laziness or lack of talent. Marcel has chosen maturity, rather than youth. In so doing, he has brought to a conclusion much of Proust's Christian symbolism, his colour symbolism, and his grand pattern of characters, all commenced by the hawthorn. The hawthorn bore in its cup tinged with blood and its thorn, part of the story of Christ, the suffering, the martyrdom, which we have seen in this final chapter that Marcel is glad to assume. But in its first syllable in French, the hawthorn hints at the dawn, the resurrection, 'made audible', if not made flesh, in Vinteuil's red septet. At the last matinée, Marcel chooses the woman dressed in red and symbolizing, to him, creative time, rather than the young girl lacking colour, just as, so

long ago, he chose the pink hawthorns 'with the colour added' to make them more valuable (for biscuits with the pink colouring added cost more in Combray shops, and cream with strawberries crushed in it tasted more interesting). In any case, the white of the winter forest, in the beards of the men and the barrenness of their minds, is enough to turn Marcel towards the vibrant red sported by the new Mme de Saint-Euverte. This latter character is only one of the new replacements of the same name. The new Princess of Guermantes is none other than Mme Verdurin (notice the French for green, or new life, appearing in both these names, whilst Oriane, Duchess of Guermantes, carries a reminder of the Golden Age for the aristocracy in her name) (83). Gilberte's daughter forms one part of the crossroad and the new Princess of Guermantes forms the other; between them, they link the most important families in the novel. They also link Combray and Balbec, the Tansonville hawthorns and the Balbec band of "les jeunes filles en fleurs". Marcel has finally understood all the messages of the hawthorns; he has two frameworks worthy of them. The hawthorns, in this final section, take their place in Marcel's internal and symbolic landscape and, finally, in his book.

(83) Beauchamp, Louis : La Vie Sociale à l'Epoque et dans l'Oeuvre de Marcel Proust, Bulletin no. 7, 1957, p. 627;
Note also the French for 'brusque', or 'crude', in Mme Verdurin's name.

The whole of the world is now a vast garden, and the
flowers of the world are now in bloom. In the old days,
the flowers of the world were in the hands of a few
rich men, and they were the only flowers that were
allowed to bloom. But now, the flowers of the world
are in the hands of all men, and they are all
allowed to bloom.

The world is now a vast garden, and the flowers of the world are now in bloom. In the old days, the flowers of the world were in the hands of a few rich men, and they were the only flowers that were allowed to bloom. But now, the flowers of the world are in the hands of all men, and they are all allowed to bloom.

The Apple Blossoms are the most beautiful of all the flowers, and they are the most common. They are the flowers of the spring, and they are the flowers of the hope. They are the flowers of the love, and they are the flowers of the life. They are the flowers of the world, and they are the flowers of the future.

The apple blossoms in many ways form a perfect complement to the hawthorns - even in Proust's fictional countryside this is obvious, the simple apple blossoms with their heaviness and abundance showing their richness, next to their poorer but more sophisticated and aristocratic neighbours, the hawthorns :

M'écartant de l'éblouissante maison de "plaisir", insolemment dressée là malgré les protestations des familles inutilement adressées au maire, je rejoignis la falaise et j'en suivis les chemins sinueux dans la direction de Balbec. J'entendis sans y répondre l'appel des aubépines. Voisines moins cossues des fleurs de pommiers, elles les trouvaient bien lourdes, tout en reconnaissant le teint frais qu'ont les filles, aux pétales rosés, de ces gros fabricants de cidre. Elles savaient que, moins richement dotées, on les recherchait cependant davantage et qu'il leur suffisait, pour plaire, d'une blancheur chiffonnée. (S. G., pp. 785, 6).

Whimsical though this passage may be, it still emphasizes the serious role of the hawthorns, calling Marcel away from pleasure, which the heavy, fresh apple blossoms, evoking country weddings and cider to come, seem to encourage. In truth, the hawthorns, with their emphasis on the thorn, become the flowers of suffering of Marcel's quest (thus, in another context, the verb 'rechercher' here associated with the hawthorns, is particularly apt). The apple blossoms, on the other hand, are definitely flowers of the dawn, as the passage on these flowers in Paris will undoubtedly show. They offer Marcel a message of joy - joy in nature, joy in sex (in that the nearest approximation to real life nymphs to realize Marcel's erotic dreams of the countryside personified are provided by these blossoms) and, of course, joy in art, for eventually Marcel cannot think of one without the other. Yet, such an acceptance of joy is slow in coming, as we shall see. Indeed, Marcel's

criticism of the joyous theme of Vinteuil's music is essentially the same as the implied criticism of the apple blossoms here. Both are too 'heavy', too 'rustic', too unfamiliar, perhaps, to a poet used to the idea that art involves, as the hawthorns point out, sacrifice and sorrow. Marcel, however, comes to enjoy the triumphant theme of Vinteuil's work, which he used to consider of "un bonheur lourd, villageois et presque rustique" (P., p. 250) and he is from the beginning attracted to the beauty of the apple trees, despite their tendency, at worst, to a certain 'vulgarity' in contrast with the hawthorns. Whilst the hawthorns emphasize the importance of suffering in the tempering of the artist, the apple blossoms represent a much simpler, more gradual and natural maturing, although the end point, art (with the emphasis on beauty rather than truth) is the same :

A intervalles symétriques, au milieu de l'inimitable ornementation de leurs feuilles qu'on ne peut confondre avec la feuille d'aucun autre arbre fruitier, les pommiers ouvraient leurs larges pétales de satin blanc ou suspendaient les timides bouquets de leurs rougissants boutons. C'est du côté de Méséglise que j'ai remarqué pour la première fois l'ombre ronde que les pommiers font sur la terre ensoleillée, et aussi ces soies d'or impalpable que le couchant tisse obliquement sous les feuilles (C. S., p. 146).

This is nature herself, then, creating a masterpiece as though she were a seamstress of great skill. This picture, and also the spectacle of the moon appearing like an actress who is waiting to go on stage, fascinates the young Marcel, who thus appreciates all the more any work of art (especially a naive and unsophisticated one) which depicts a similar scene. He loves :

ces oeuvres naïvement incomplètes comme étaient mes propres impressions et que les soeurs de ma grand'mère s'indignaient

de me voir aimer. Elles pensaient qu'on doit mettre devant les enfants, et qu'ils font preuve de goût en aimant d'abord, les oeuvres que, parvenu à la maturité, on admire définitivement. C'est sans doute qu'elles se figuraient les mérites esthétiques comme des objets matériels qu'un oeil ouvert ne peut faire autrement que de percevoir, sans avoir eu besoin d'en mûrir lentement des équivalents dans son propre coeur.
(C. S., p. 146).

The apple blossoms here, then, reflect a certain naiveté of aesthetic appreciation on the part of the young Marcel, although he does share with the impressionists a fascination with light and shadow. Even more remarkably, when we consider the role the apple plays in the popular version of the story of Genesis, Marcel's use of apple tree imagery contains very little depth of symbolic meaning, and practically no moral judgements, as though Proust had decided to leave the hawthorn to carry the main mythological burden in his novel. Here, the white and red of the blossoms and buds form a visual contrast important to the composition of the picture, but the colours do not carry any psychological or symbolic overtones as with the hawthorns. Of course, Proust was probably influenced here by the knowledge of traditional colour symbolism which he used to such good effect with the hawthorns and which clash with a flower which is pink in its youthful stage and white in maturity (not its old age). It seems as though with the apple blossoms, Proust reverts to the simpler view of flowers he held most of the time in Jean Santeuil, where the hawthorns were living metaphors because of their colours, and the apple blossoms, with their particular freshness, gave Jean human pleasure akin to meeting an old friend. (Although even in Jean Santeuil the hawthorn does begin to show some complexity) :

Jean avait, entre toutes les fleurs qu'il avait devant lui sans les voir et sans les aimer, élu l'épine rose, pour laquelle, il avait un amour spécial, dont il se faisait une idée définie ... Etait-ce que cet arbre est plus beau que d'autres, que les fleurs si composées et si colorées ont l'air de fleurs de fête ... Etait-ce qu'ayant vu auparavant de l'épine blanche, la vue d'une épine rose dont les fleurs ne sont plus simples mais composées le frappa à la fois de ces deux prestiges de l'analogie et de la différence qui ont tant de pouvoir sur notre esprit? (1)

Or, on the subject of the apple blossoms :

Et ce plaisir infini par lequel, nous promenant le long d'un verger, nous reconnaissons tout d'un coup ces fleurs blanches du pommier, ses feuilles et les bouquets roses de ses boutons, c'est un plaisir moral ... nous avons senti dans ces feuilles, dans ces bonnes fleurs blanches quelque chose qui nous parlait, comme quand nous rencontrons dans un défilé une personne aimée qui nous sourit, nous fait bonjour. (2)

Yet, here in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, Proust could easily have lent the apple blossoms a moral significance had he wanted to; not only does the Méséglise Way show Marcel the shape of the shadows of the apple trees, it also shows him other shadows, noticeably the lesbianism of Mlle Vinteuil which we have discussed in such detail in the hawthorn chapter. However, whereas the hawthorns celebrated the storm and the necessity of suffering for the artist, the apple imagery offers Marcel, during a storm along the Méséglise Way, a most amusing portrait of modern day Combray folk in medieval guise and quite unusual roles; here, the beauty of the old church sculptures have their comic overtones, but later, the spectacle of the apple trees, most lovely after a spring storm, will do much to alleviate the sorrow, part of the hawthorn 'martyrdom', Marcel feels after his grandmother's death.

(1) Proust, Marcel : Jean Santeuil, Vol. 1, Editions Gallimard, 1952 pp. 203-204.

(2) Ibid, pp. 137-138.

Sheltering from the usual inclement weather along the Méséglise Way in the church of Saint-André-des-Champs, Marcel learns of the continuity of life that art can depict, a continuity amoral if not actually organic. Thus it is that, from the 'stone tree' of the church sculptures angels' features of medieval times can 'reblossom' in the apple cheeks of Théodore, who is, ironically, far from angelic in modern Combray :

Souvent aussi nous allions nous abriter, pêle-mêle avec les saints et les patriarches de pierre sous le porche de Saint-André-des-Champs. Que cette église était française! Au-dessus de la porte, les saints, les rois-chevaliers une fleur de lys à la main, des scènes de noces et de funérailles étaient représentés comme ils pouvaient l'être dans l'âme de Françoise. Le sculpteur avait aussi narré certaines anecdotes relatives à Aristote et à Virgile, de la même façon que Françoise à la cuisine parlait volontiers de saint Louis comme si elle l'avait personnellement connu, et généralement pour faire honte par la comparaison à mes grands-parents moins "justes". On sentait que les notions que l'artiste médiéval et la paysanne médiévale (survivant au xix^e siècle) avaient de l'histoire ancienne ou chrétienne, et qui se distinguaient par autant d'inexactitude que de bonhomie, ils les tenaient non des livres, mais d'une tradition à la fois antique et directe, ininterrompue, orale, déformée, méconnaissable et vivante. Une autre personnalité de Combray que je reconnaissais aussi, virtuelle et prophétisée, dans la sculpture gothique de Saint-André-des-Champs, c'était le jeune Théodore, le garçon de chez Camus. Françoise sentait d'ailleurs si bien en lui un pays et un contemporain que, quand ma tante Léonie était trop malade pour que Françoise pût suffire à la retourner dans son lit, à la porter dans son fauteuil, plutôt que de laisser la fille de cuisine monter se faire "bien voir" de ma tante, elle appelait Théodore. Or ce garçon, qui passait et avec raison pour si mauvais sujet, était tellement rempli de l'âme qui avait décoré Saint-André-des-Champs et notamment des sentiments de respect que Françoise trouvait dus aux "pauvres malades", à "sa pauvre maîtresse", qu'il avait pour soulever la tête de ma tante sur son oreiller la mine naïve et zélée des petits anges des bas-reliefs, s'empressant, un cierge à la main, autour de la Vierge défaillante, comme si les visages de pierre sculptée, grisâtres et nus, ainsi que sont les bois en hiver, n'étaient qu'un ensommeillement, qu'une réserve, prête à reflorir dans la vie en innombrables visages populaires, révérends et futés comme celui de Théodore, enluminés de la rougeur d'une pomme mûre. (C. S., pp. 150, 151).

Art, here, then, has taken over nature's role of preserving various human types, like types of fruit, for the future. In so doing, neither art nor nature takes much heed of ethical ambiguities, so that Théodore can truly be at the same time reverend and cunning - on one hand, feeling the traditional sympathy for an invalid, especially one who is above him in the social order, on the other hand a very bad character indeed. He is one of the youngsters who indulged in various erotic games in the dungeons of Roussainville, games which Gilberte wished to share with Marcel, as though to offer him the same temptation, the same 'taste of the apple' which Théodore has given her. It is doubly ironic that Marcel has already discerned the true nature of the Roussainville dungeon, which he has (quite rightly in terms of an orthodox Christian morality) likened to the Cities of the Plain, deserving the punishments of hell, whilst here, he imagines Théodore as a creature of heaven. By a similar irony, Aunt Léonie is associated with the Virgin Mary. One point we must make about Théodore however. He may well be a more suitable candidate for hell than heaven; he becomes a procurer for the homosexual Prince of Guermantes, and his sister, not lagging far behind, is the maid to Mme Putbus who figures so largely in Marcel's erotic imaginings. However, in making Théodore a chemist in Combray Proust may perhaps be paying a certain tribute to Théodore's curiosity and enterprise, since his Medieval counterpart (and Théodore, the church porch sculptures show us, is a throw-back to these times) would have been, perhaps, an alchemist. Moreover, in spite of, or perhaps because of, his varied experiences, Théodore is one of the first

people to recognize the worth of Marcel's first published work, and to write him a letter on it (F., p. 591). In fact, when Proust says that Françoise recognizes in Théodore a *compatriote* and a contemporary, we feel that he means not just the country of Medieval France (how French the church is! he says) but the timeless country of art, in which traditions, however changed by generations of oral transmission, come and stay alive. In the light of this idea, Marcel is probably correct, for example, in recognizing Françoise's kitchen company the nearest approximation to a modern equivalent of a Last Supper and a chivalric fellowship with a true medieval hierarchy.

If this passage, in which Marcel receives a respite from the connotations of evil in the storm over Roussainville when he shelters in the church porch, shows art resembling the workings of nature, the next passage, which also features a storm, shows nature resembling a work of art. It is very important to our understanding of the deeper, general meaning of the storm in Proust's work to put this passage in context. We have already seen in Allégorie that the storm, for Proust, can mean any severe emotional crisis, a significance reaffirmed by the lilac imagery. Here, Marcel has just become aware of "les intermittences du coeur" - of how callously he has forgotten his much-beloved, now dead, grandmother, and of how deep sorrow reexperienced after a break in time can be. Learning that his grandmother was so careful of her appearance on her last photograph in order to hide from her grandson the ravages of her

illness, he cannot bear to look at it. "je souffris toute la journée en restant devant la photographie de ma grand'mère. Elle me torturait" (S. G., p. 778). However, as the days pass, Marcel's grief lessens, so that, just before he sees the apple trees in bloom, he can think of his grandmother without exaggerated remorse. The season of storms is ending. The sight of the apple trees is either the agent which finally pulls Marcel out of his sorrow - or a symbol of the young hero's brighter outlook, a hint of the future joy to be found in art. In any case, on a factual level, the storm which, here, drenches the apple trees does not destroy their beauty. Its violence, however, lives on in Proust's confusion of 'violent' for 'violet' (line 16).

je partis me promener seul vers cette grande route que prenait la voiture de Mme de Villeparisis quand nous allions nous promener avec ma grand'mère; des flaques d'eau, que le soleil qui brillait n'avait pas séchées, faisaient du sol un vrai marécage, et je pensais à ma grand'mère qui jadis ne pouvait marcher deux pas sans se crotter. Mais, dès que je fus arrivé à la route, ce fut un éblouissement. Là où je n'avais vu, avec ma grand'mère, au mois d'août, que les feuilles et comme l'emplacement des pommiers, à perte de vue ils étaient en pleine floraison, d'un luxe inouï, les pieds dans la boue et en toilette de bal, ne prenant pas de précautions pour ne pas gâter le plus merveilleux satin rose qu'on eût jamais vu et que faisait briller le soleil; l'horizon lointain de la mer fournissait aux pommiers comme un arrière-plan d'estampe japonaise; si je levais la tête pour regarder le ciel entre les fleurs, qui faisaient paraître son bleu rasséréné, presque violent, elles semblaient s'écarter pour montrer la profondeur de ce paradis. Sous cet azur, une brise légère mais froide faisait trembler légèrement les bouquets rougissants. Des mésanges bleues venaient se poser sur les branches et sautaient entre les fleurs, indulgentes, comme si c'eût été un amateur d'exotisme et de couleurs qui avait artificiellement créé cette beauté vivante. Mais elle touchait jusqu'aux larmes parce que, si loin qu'elle allât dans ses effets d'art raffiné, on sentait qu'elle était naturelle, que ces pommiers étaient là en pleine campagne, comme des paysans sur une grande route de France. Puis aux rayons du soleil succédèrent subitement ceux de la pluie; ils zébrèrent tout l'horizon enserrèrent la file des pommiers dans leur réseau gris. Mais ceux-ci continuaient à dresser leur beauté, fleurie et rose, dans le vent devenu glacial sous l'averse qui tombait : c'était une journée de printemps.

(S. G., p. 781).

This passage shows a certain similarity with the early Allégorie in that a clear parallel might be made between the scene in nature and the poet's frame of mind. However, the earlier unsophisticated work is truly allegorical; the flowers which are destroyed by the storm are not even named, as they need not be, representing only part of the author destroyed by unhappiness. The apple trees with their blossoms have very much a life of their own. Moreover, they show no sign at all of letting the storm destroy them or their beauty. In fact, the image of the apple blossoms killed by the weather, used by Charlus in the melodramatic scene which he provokes in order to persuade Marcel to spend the night with him, renders the sentimental use of the storm symbol quite ridiculous. "Ma sympathie un peu prématurée avait fleuri trop tôt; et comme ces pommiers dont vous parliez poétiquement à Balbec, elle n'a pu résister à une première gelée" (C. G., pp. 560-561).

They do, however, touch the human world through the framework of Marcel's mind. He sees them as part of a work of art, though he is particularly moved by the fact that they are entirely natural; still, the blue backdrop, the contrast of colours, is so spectacular that it reminds Marcel of the Japanese prints which so delighted the Impressionists. We might add here that the sea as a backdrop reminds us that everything that does happen at Balbec unrolls against the background of Marcel's love for Albertine, which he equates with a love of the sea. Yet it is an aesthetic impression here which moves him to tears, in direct contrast to Allégorie, which seems to refer to an incident in the

author's emotional life. Marcel further introduces the apple trees into the human sphere by likening them in their beauty to young girls in ball dresses, or, in their typifying the countryside, to peasants. In fact, the apple trees seem to come as close as possible to providing Marcel with a female presence through which to enjoy the countryside in which he finds himself, a common dream in his erotic imaginings along the Méséglise Way :

C'est qu'aussi - comme il arrive dans ces moments de rêverie au milieu de la nature où, l'action de l'habitude étant suspendue, nos notions abstraites des choses mises de côté, nous croyons d'une foi profonde à l'originalité, à la vie individuelle du lieu où nous nous trouvons - la passante qu'appelait mon désir me semblait être non un exemplaire quelconque de ce type général : la femme, mais un produit nécessaire et naturel de ce sol ... Et la terre et les êtres, je ne les séparais pas. J'avais le désir d'une paysanne de Méséglise ou de Roussainville, d'une pêcheuse de Balbec, comme j'avais le désir de Méséglise et de Balbec.
(C. S., pp. 156, 157).

Thus, though he never does 'possess' a peasant representing Balbec (and in fact his affair with Albertine is unsatisfactory because he insists on regarding her as an embodiment of the Balbec seascape), the beauty of the countryside can enter Marcel's imagination through the sight of these metaphorical peasants, these trees which remind the poet of young girls at a ball, ready for any festival, yet, with peasant common sense, with their feet firmly planted in the mud. There even appears to be a rare (for the apple trees) mythological level to this passage. It could be argued that Marcel goes a long way towards regarding the trees as though they were nymphs. But, more important than this idea is Proust's associating the apple trees with paradise,

a very sound connection in the context of both Greek and Celtic mythology. In the former we find the paradisaal Garden of the Hesperides with its golden apples ⁽³⁾, and in the latter, the Land of Youth, a version of which is Avalon, "the secret 'island of apple trees' " ⁽⁴⁾.

If he 'possesses' the Balbec countryside through his appreciation of these trees, Marcel is also able to enjoy through the apple blossoms the essence of the Balbec dawn even though he is miles away in Paris :

Combien de fois à Paris, dans le mois de mai de l'année suivante, il m'arriva d'acheter une branche de pommier chez le fleuriste et de passer ensuite la nuit devant ses fleurs où s'épanouissait la même essence crémeuse qui pourrait encore de son écume les bourgeons de feuilles et entre les blanches corolles desquelles il semblait que ce fût le marchand qui, par générosité envers moi, par goût inventif aussi et contraste ingénieux, eût ajouté de chaque côté, en surplus, un seyant bouton rose; je les regardais, je les faisais poser sous ma lampe - si longtemps que j'étais souvent encore là quand l'aurore leur apportait la même rougeur qu'elle devait faire en même temps à Balbec - et je cherchais à les reporter sur cette route par l'imagination, à les multiplier, à les étendre dans le cadre préparé sur la toile toute prête, de ces clos dont je savais le dessin par coeur et que j'aurais tant voulu, qu'un jour je devais, revoir, au moment où, avec la verve ravissante du génie, le printemps couvre leur canevas de ses couleurs
(J. F., p. 707).

Before we discuss this passage in detail, we must point out that it represents the middle of three attempts on Marcel's part to capture for himself something of the essence of the dawn. As usual, his first (and least successful) attempt centres around a young girl :

Si un être peut être le produit d'un sol dont on goûte en lui le charme particulier, plus encore que la paysanne que j'avais tant désiré voir apparaître quand j'errais seul du côté de Méséglise ...

(3) Graves, Robert : The White Goddess, Faber and Faber Ltd., London, mcmlii, p. 414.

(4) Ibid, p. 252.

ce devait être la grande fille que je vis sortir de cette maison et, sur le sentier qu'illuminait obliquement le soleil levant, venir vers la gare en portant une jarre de lait ... Empourpré des reflets du matin, son visage était plus rose que le ciel.
(J. F., p. 655).

However, even at this point, Marcel, or the narrator, insists that such women in themselves do not necessarily bring beauty and happiness into the lives of the poet who seeks them out. In fact, the imaginings built around a possible happy future with such a woman prevent the young author from recreating the person within himself and from understanding the impression she evoked of the countryside and the dawn.

The hawthorns, of course, represent the most serious side of Marcel's quest for the dawn; yet, we have seen that Proust tended more to emphasize the thorn, or suffering, associated with the flower and its name than the dawn, or final joy. Even Vinteuil's septet seems to have as much to say about pain as it has to say about joy.

Here, then, in the Paris passage we have a more simple recapturing of dawn in the apple blossoms, as though the trees were truly those of paradise, as mentioned in the previous apple blossom passage, and thus offering a rosy if not a golden promise, such as one might associate with the Garden of the Hesperides rather than the garden of Eden. The colours mentioned are the natural colours of the flowers, or the tinge of the dawn itself. Yet, Marcel seems surprised that nature could be such a marvellous artist, could provide as well such a suitable framework for the blossoms without human intervention. Art, and his role as an

artist, aesthetic appreciation rather than passionate involvement in nature, is coming to the forefront of Marcel's life. Already he is recreating the flowers in his own mind, absorbing nature's pattern, which will become so important to the pattern of his own work of art.

At Balbec, the apple blossoms have been associated with an artist, perhaps, considering their own lack of sophistication, with a very humble artist - Mme de Villeparisis. By a typical Proustian paradox, her social position is far from humble, but, as an artist, she seems to ask only that painting give her "un passe-temps charmant parce que si les fleurs nées du pinceau n'étaient pas fameuses, du moins les peindre vous faisait vivre dans la société des fleurs naturelles, de la beauté desquelles, surtout quand on était obligé de les regarder de plus près pour les imiter, on ne se lassait pas" (J. F., p. 709). She, thus, likes art because it leads her to nature; Marcel, on the other hand, finds his goal, art, through nature. Even if the carriage rides Mme de Villeparisis shares with Marcel and his grandmother offer them only the view of apple trees that have lost their blossoms, Marcel can still imagine the leaves as "le tapis d'estrade d'une fête nuptiale maintenant terminée, (qui) avait été tout récemment foulée par la traîne de satin blanc des fleurs rougissantes" (J. F., p. 707). Moreover, during the drives he is tantalized by various pretty passers-by whom he associates with the spirit of the countryside - "ces créatures-fleurs de la belle journée" (J. F., p. 711). The most important incident, however, during

these carriage rides again involves trees, this time unidentified, since their role in recalling time past is their most significant function. Marcel at this point in the story does not have the self-discipline necessary to pursue and pin down the source of happiness these trees bring, a happiness occurring most probably because they remind him of another carriage ride and the sight of three steeples in Combray. In any case, he is incapable of the effort needed to retrace this memory (which resulted in Marcel's first literary work, in which he compared the steeples to young girls and to flowers) and so feels that "Elle (the carriage) m'entraînait loin de ce que je croyais seul vrai, de ce qui m'eût rendu vraiment heureux, elle ressemblait à ma vie". For the trees are "des fantômes du passé, de chers compagnons de mon enfance" (J. F., p. 719), and Marcel here cannot help regretting life's moving him away from his childhood, and crossroads' (here "un croisement de routes") offering him choices incompatible with retaining his carefree youth. As with the church steeples, however, Marcel appreciates the changing perspectives and views of the trees that the moving carriage gives them. Once again, he associates something which he cannot quite understand but which moves him deeply, with mythological images - "Cependant ils venaient vers moi; peut-être apparition mythique, ronde de sorcières ou de nornes qui me proposait ses oracles" (J. F., p. 719). Nothing could form a stronger contrast to the apple blossoms, with their simple, easily appreciated beauty which produces in Marcel a thoroughly understandable happiness. Yet, when we follow the apple blossoms, through this same Mme de Villeparisis into Parisian society, we can see

the shadow of another fate in Proust's, if not in Marcel's life, for, in society, the unsuspecting apple blossoms seem to bring out the worst in people - although the emphasis is on the ridiculous rather than on real evil.

At Mme de Villeparisis' reception, we find her in the role of artist, surrounded by her guests, each of whom indicates his pet foibles in his reactions to the flowers. Legrandin produces more of his deathly poetry in describing the flowers Mme de Villeparisis is painting (after all, he has to make up for crashing the party in the first place). As usual, his remarks, especially as he talks of silk painting much as Marcel talks of Japanese prints, seem to caricature Marcel's use of imagery :

- Ces fleurs sont d'un rose vraiment céleste, dit Legrandin, je veux dire couleur de ciel rose. Car il y a un rose ciel comme il y a un bleu ciel. Mais, murmura-t-il pour tâcher de n'être entendu que de la marquise, je crois que je penche encore pour le soyeux, pour l'incarnat vivant de la copie que vous en faites. Ah! vous laissez bien loin derrière vous Pisanello et Van Huysum, leur herbier minutieux et mort.
(C. G., pp. 213, 214).

The historian next affirms that these are cherry blossoms - much to the disgust of the Duchess of Guermantes and Mme de Villeparisis, who, boasting of their country ways, seem to vie in inverse snobbery. Mme de Villeparisis wins. Easily. After all, she has a friend who is a florist and who sends her these flowers.

The aristocracy, however, does not always appreciate the natural advantages of their estates. The Duchess of Guermantes points out that the Duke of Châtellerauld's father has a place in Normandy "qui a de

magnifiques pommiers au bord de la mer, comme un paravant japonais" (C. G., p. 214) (her appreciation, then, is definitely aesthetic and sophisticated as well as 'rustic'). But the Duke of Châtellerault never sees them, because they give him hay fever. In the chapter on the pine tree, we shall see how this illness caused by pollen is associated in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu with illicit sex, usually with homosexuality - and the duke is no exception to this pattern. Proust himself felt keenly the fact that he could not see regularly his beloved apple trees in bloom, as he, too, suffered from hay fever and asthma. "elles me donnent de terribles crises d'asthme, punition de les avoir trop aimées qui prend dans mon cas quelque chose plus encore, la légende d'une Némésis cachée au coeur des pommiers" (5). Maybe he considered it a punishment - at least he called it his fate, his 'Nemesis', or just fate. We wonder, too, if Proust knew that statues of Nemesis showed her carrying an apple bough. Her name comes from the Greek "nemos" or "grove" and, originally she would punish various taboos (6). And, here, we can see Proust literally imagining the figure of a goddess half hidden inside the apple blossoms. Perhaps the logic behind this classical allusion may be that Proust himself was not always sure that he approved of his own methods of 'fertilization', his love life, and thus was not surprised when nature's fertilization process turned against him, an idea we may see more clearly in the orchid and pine tree chapters. In any case, here, the pervading tone of the novel is comic, and the interlude of the socialites and the apple

(5) Proust, Marcel : Lettre à Gabriel Mourey, Bulletin §22, 1972, p. 1291.

(6) Graves, Robert : The White Goddess, p. 253.

blossoms ends when Bloch throws a damper on it (literally) by upsetting the vase all over the carpet. All the underdogs are then left to quarrel as to who has come out worst in the whole scene, which they do much to the amusement of Marcel the observer.

In society, then, the apple blossoms do not bring out the best in people. But, in nature, they never fail to inspire Marcel, partly because of the simplicity of their appeal. On the one hand, they represent the earthy quality of nature, the need for experience in the artist, his wish to participate in the happy 'normal' or natural side of life. Thus, when he and Albertine are mutually imprisoned in love, Marcel finds himself longing for certain things :

Peut-être l'habitude que j'avais prise de garder au fond de moi certains désirs, désir d'une jeune fille du monde comme celles que je voyais passer de ma fenêtre suivies de leur institutrice, et plus particulièrement de celle dont m'avait parlé Saint-Loup, qui allait dans les maisons de passe, désir de belles femmes de chambre, et particulièrement celle de Mme Putbus, désir d'aller à la campagne au début du printemps revoir des aubépines, des pommiers en fleurs, des tempêtes, désir de Venise, désir de me mettre au travail, désir de mener la vie de tout le monde. (P., p. 86).

This, then, is the Marcel who longs for country women who typify their surroundings whilst he is in the country, or city women in Paris. We meet again Mme Putbus' maid, sister to apple-cheeked Théodore, the hawthorns, the storm and, of course, the apple trees in bloom - all things which satisfy in Marcel the desire to lead an ordinary life, and at the same time, the desire to set to work. In respect to his art, on the other hand, the apple trees (amongst others) have a very straight forward message for Marcel. "En pensant que leurs arbres, poiriers,

pommiers, tamaris, me survivraient, il me semblait recevoir d'eux le conseil de me mettre enfin au travail, pendant que n'avait pas encore sonné l'heure du repos éternel" (S. G., p. 1013).

Thus, in many different ways, the apple blossoms in their own beauty and the happiness it causes in Marcel push him gently towards art which will provide, as the hawthorn imagery shows us, an eternal joy and an everlasting dawn. Perhaps the apple trees, in gentle contrast to their biblical cousins (at least in popular tradition) point out in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu Proust's contention that art is distinct from morality, but that, if there is a morality, it is that of all great art. "Plus que je pense aux théories de Ruskin et de Whistler, plus je crois qu'elles ne sont pas inconciliables. Whistler a raison de dire dans Ten O'Clock, que l'Art est distinct de la Morale. Et pourtant, Ruskin émet aussi une vérité, d'un autre plan, quand il dit que tout grand art est moralité" (7).

(7) Proust, Marcel : Lettres à une Amie (Marie Nordlinger), Manchester, 1942, p. 85. (As quoted by Richard Ellmann, Golden Codgers, Oxford University Press, London, N. Y., Toronto, 1973, p. 59).

As we have seen in a brief reference to the pear trees in Jean Santeuil discussed in the previous chapter, these fruit trees are relatively simple images. That is, their blossoms could scarcely more obviously symbolize the virginity, purity, and innocence traditionally associated with the colour white.

Proust's attitude towards innocence, however, as we saw in the hawthorn chapter, is not simple. He shows it as an ambivalent quality, often a mixture of ignorance or illusion. Indeed, in his metaphor drawn from the myth of Sodom and Gomorrah, the pear trees become angels, mysterious strangers to this earth unused to their purity. The pear tree does not appear very often in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, perhaps suggesting Proust's estimate of the importance or even the prevalence of innocence in human beings.

The main passage devoted to the pear trees is full of ironies. Marcel has been invited to meet Robert's mistress, Rachel. The day is particularly beautiful and full of promise. The pear trees suggest the celebration of an initiation into life :

dans le village debanlieue où habitait sa maîtresse, ce fut un émerveillement de voir chaque jardinet pavoisé par les immenses reposoirs blancs des arbres fruitiers en fleurs. C'était comme une de ses fêtes singulières, poétiques, éphémères et locales qu'on vient de très loin contempler à époques fixes, mais celle-là donnée par la nature ... Mais les grands poiriers enveloppaient chaque maison, chaque modeste cour d'une blancheur plus vaste, plus unie, plus éclatante, comme si tous les logis, tous les enclos du village fussent en train de faire, à la même date, leur première communion.
(C. G., p. 155).

Here, the pear trees seem to show some of the apple trees' ability to evoke or represent a locality and some of the hawthorns' associations with religion. Here, the idea of a first communion, of course, is suggested by the envelopping white blossoms, the 'white dresses' of the houses. However, the idea of the first communion implies an initiation into adult life, a special communion, which in itself was a symbol that fascinated Proust, as we saw in the tilleul chapter. Marcel stands and gazes at the pear trees while Saint-Loup fetches his mistress. He is shocked to discover that she is none other than (as he named her) "Rachel quand du Seigneur" (so called because of her Jewishness)⁽¹⁾ one of the less popular and cheaper prostitutes from a brothel which he used to frequent. Immediately, the whole scene, including the pear trees, takes on a new significance to Marcel :

Ce n'était pas "Rachel quand du Seigneur" qui me semblait peu de chose, c'était la puissance de l'imagination humaine, l'illusion sur laquelle reposaient les douleurs de l'amour, que je trouvais grandes. Robert vit que j'avais l'air ému. Je détournais les yeux vers les poiriers et les cerisiers du jardin d'en face pour qu'il crût que c'était leur beauté qui me touchait. Et elle me touchait un peu de la même façon, elle mettait aussi près de moi de ces choses qu'on ne voit pas qu'avec ses yeux, mais qu'on sent dans son coeur. Ces arbustes que j'avais vus dans le jardin, en les prenant pour des dieux étrangers, ne m'étais-je pas trompé comme Madeleine quand, dans un autre jardin, un jour dont l'anniversaire allait bientôt venir, elle vit une forme humaine et "crut que c'était le jardinier"? Gardiens des souvenirs de l'âge d'or, garants de la promesse que la réalité n'est pas ce qu'on croit, que la splendeur de la poésie, que l'éclat merveilleux de l'innocence peuvent y resplendir et pourront être la récompense que nous nous efforcerons de mériter, les grandes créatures blanches merveilleusement penchées au-dessus de l'ombre propice à la sieste, à la pêche, à la lecture, n'étais-ce plutôt des anges?

(C. G., pp. 160-161).

(1) The quotation here, "Rachel quand du Seigneur", comes from an opera by Scribe, *La Juive*, from which Marcel's grandfather selects various catch-phrases which he uses to poke (usually gentle) fun at guests. This one expressed his dislike (aptly, since the play revolves around the theme of anti-semitism) of Marcel's Jewish friend, Bloch. But the quotation also has a serious side for Saint-Loup's Rachel in Proust's personal symbolism. As a Jewess and a lesbian (Proust often links the two), she courts in symbolic terms the fate of the Rachel of the opera, who is burned for her faith. M. Bernard, we shall see later, is also associated with the Jewess, for he, too, assumes other identities and enjoys secret rites.

Then Marcel proceeds to place these angels in a precise biblical context :

Les maisons en étaient sordides. Mais à côté des plus misérables, de celles qui avaient l'air d'avoir été brûlées par une pluie de salpêtre, un mystérieux voyageur, arrêté pour un jour dans la cité maudite, un ange resplendissant se tenait debout, étendant largement sur elle l'éblouissante protection de ses ailes d'innocence : c'était un poirier en fleurs.

This whole passage, along with the introductory description of the trees as first communicants, describes, as much as anything, Marcel's progression from belief to disillusionment in the events of the afternoon. (Later, art will restore some of his beliefs). At first, of course, Marcel believes that spring's purity is shared by the village, the 'first communicants'; then he wonders if these trees do not represent a super human innocence, belonging only to childhood or to poetry or to the springtime resurrection of Nature herself. His questionings here are made evident by two question marks. Finally, he decides that these trees are angels - but the angels which come to warn Sodom and Gomorrah of their imminent punishment for evil. Only those who believe can be protected and redeemed. This choice of story, as we shall see, criticizes the blind innocence of the angels as much as the corruption of the villagers who are themselves turned blind by the angels in the Bible.

From the beginning, the pear tree descriptions are ironic. Far from joining in a first communion celebration, Marcel will undergo a baptism by fire in as much as he will witness his first hint of the fire from heaven destined for homosexuals. Only the most tainted sorts of

'innocence' remain to Saint-Loup and Rachel. Saint-Loup is caught in the same trap of love as Swann before him and Marcel in the future. He does keep up, in wordly terms, a type of 'pure' love with Rachel, mainly through cowardice and naivety, qualities which can remain of innocence when one no longer has the excuse of inexperience :

Il arrive même parfois dans ce cas, quand on a eu, par un mélange de naïveté dans le jugement et de lâcheté devant la souffrance, la folie de faire d'une fille une inaccessible idole, que ces dernières faveurs, où même le premier baiser, on ne l'obtiendra jamais, on n'ose même plus le demander pour ne pas démentir des assurances de platonique amour
(C. G., p. 160).

With their simplicity, the pear trees contrast even more the difference between the Rachel that Saint-Loup sees and the one that Marcel sees. "J'avais compris le matin, devant les poiriers en fleurs, l'illusion sur laquelle reposait l'amour de Robert pour "Rachel quand du Seigneur" " (C. G., p. 182), says Marcel later in the theatre where Rachel is an actress. We should add here that the "Rachel quand du Seigneur" to whom Marcel refers is the heroine of an opera called "La Juive"; she is burned at the stake, and Saint-Loup's Rachel, through her involvement with homosexuality runs the risk as well of a (metaphorical) death by fire - the fire from heaven which destroys the other 'accursed race' - the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. If the pear trees are "Gardiens des souvenirs de l'âge d'or", each shadow "propice à la sieste, à la pêche, à la lecture", in other words, all those positive images of experience (remember the Fisher King myth in the hawthorn chapter), Rachel is part of a Kingdom of much more sinister gold and much more addictive dreams. To begin with, Robert must buy her love in order to

be sure of her, and he lies about this fact to others :

Moins comblée, elle serait moins gentille, ne lui dirait, ne lui écrirait plus de ces choses qui le touchaient tant et qu'il citait avec un peu d'ostentation à ses camarades, en prenant soin de faire remarquer combien c'était gentil d'elle, mais en omettant qu'il l'entretenait fastueusement, même qu'il lui donnât quoi que ce fût, que ces dédicaces sur une photographie ou cette formule pour terminer une dépêche, c'était la transmutation de l'or sous la forme la plus réduite et la plus précieuse. (C. G., p. 162).

Surely it is a false gold that Saint-Loup thus obtains from his alchemical transmutation. However, Saint-Loup is driven by "le besoin de rêve, le besoin d'être heureux" (C. G., p. 175) which Rachel the actress satisfies. Her face is so nebulous that it only takes on character when she is playing a role. The narrator expresses Saint-Loup's feelings thus, when he first makes Rachel's acquaintance after a play. "Les portes d'or du monde des rêves s'étaient refermées sur Rachel avant que Saint-Loup l'eût vue sortir du théâtre, de sorte que les taches de rousseur et les boutons eurent peu d'importance" (C. G., p. 175). And yet, if Saint-Loup only knew, freckles and blemishes are Proust's invariable warning as to the blemished nature of such females as Odette, Gilberte and Mlle Vinteuil.

With the name Mlle Vinteuil, we return to the theme of Sodom and Gomorrah, introduced in this section by the pear trees. The myth is not at all out of place. Quite ironically, Rachel 'puts on the role of ingénue' at the same time as she hints at certain lesbian tendencies in a remark to a boy dancer dressed in a skirt. "Est-ce qu'elles font aussi comme

ça avec les femmes, ces petites mains-là? jeta-t-elle au danseur du fond du théâtre, avec une voix facticement mélodieuse et innocente d'ingénue. Tu as l'air d'une femme toi-même, je crois qu'on pourrait très bien s'entendre avec toi et une de mes amies" (C. G., p. 180). Nor does Saint-Loup escape a brush with Sodom; he is accosted by a homosexual in the street who is dazzled by his (effeminate?) beauty. Perhaps the homosexual sees deeper into Saint-Loup's character than he does himself, for Saint-Loup does later become a homosexual. Certainly, Saint-Loup is very insecure in his more conventional affair with Rachel.

At one other time, Proust mentions the motif of the pear trees, this time an illusion of pear tree blossoms cast by the moon on the streets of blacked-out Paris (T. R., p. 736). These moonlight petals help to form "le charme mystérieux et voilé d'une vision d'Orient" (T. R., p. 737) and to introduce the strange nocturnal episode in which Marcel traces Charlus and Saint-Loup to Jupien's brothel.

However, let us return to the 'angel' pear trees, for their message is not all gloomy. In Proust's retelling of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, he wryly points out Jehovah's mistake in his attempt to eradicate homosexuals. "Car les deux anges qui avaient été placés aux portes de Sodome pour savoir si ses habitants, dit la Genèse, avaient entièrement fait toutes les choses dont le cri était monté jusqu'à l'Eternel, avaient été, on ne peut que s'en réjouir, très mal choisis

par le Seigneur, lequel n'eût dû confier la tâche qu'à un Sodomiste" (S. G., p. 631). For, the innocence of angels being of no good to them in judging human beings, they accepted all the excuses of the homosexuals who were ashamed of their acts and hid their tendencies. The parable according to Proust is amusing, but the serious fact is that Marcel, faced with the brilliant purity of the pear trees is forced to admit that their innocence is not entirely relevant to human nature watched by a keen observer. Apart from the dishonesty of Saint-Loup's and Rachel's love, and the hints of homosexuality, Marcel is tremendously disappointed to learn that his best friend Saint-Loup deliberately failed to salute him and show his friendship from the carriage he was sharing with some noble friend. Marcel is even disappointed in himself for accepting the frivolities of social life and alcohol instead of admiring the spring and composing himself to creative effort. Still, there is a lot of humour in the fact that the person who recalls him to his work is the hypocritical old windbag, Legrandin, who greets him with the words : "Ah! Vous voilà ... homme chic et en redingote encore! ... Il est vrai que vous devez être un mondain, faire des visites! Pour aller rêver comme je le fais devant quelque tombe à demi détruite, ma lavallière et mon veston ne sont pas déplacés" (C. G., p. 153-4).

Nonetheless, the positive message of the pear trees is that "la poésie" and those steps towards it, "la sieste, la pêche, et la lecture" are tremendously important, are, indeed, Marcel's vocation. To this extent

the trees are angels of annunciation. At Balbec, Marcel thinks about his vocation; "En pensant que leurs arbres, poiriers, pommiers, tamaris, me survivraient, il me semblait recevoir d'eux le conseil de me mettre enfin au travail, pendant que n'avait pas encore sonné l'heure du repos éternel" (S. G., p. 1013). He knows that for him as for Bergotte, the only true angels of resurrection will be his books. "On l'enterra, mais toute la nuit funèbre, aux vitrines éclairées, ses livres, disposés trois par trois, veillaient comme des anges aux ailes éployées et semblaient, pour celui qui n'était plus, le symbole de sa résurrection" (P., p. 188).

The Red and Violet Flowers

The third image in the trilogy of flowers which re-embodies the colour
 symbolics of the language is that of the red and violet flowers. As
 we have seen, red is French (and traditionally) is the colour of passion
 or experience and, as this chapter and the next will show, is
 violet (1). "Must never identify these flowers. Yet, as King Lear
 suggests, "and 'tis a flower as red as blood" as a point central to
 the *Redevelopment*. This passage is a metaphorical point of departure
 and is a key to the "red and violet flowers" of Marcel Proust. The
 "grandes fleurs de sang", as it is called in the *Redevelopment* (2). In other
 words, the red and violet flowers are very much part of Proust's human
 landscape - and, in fact, the 'Red Flowers' metaphor which forms the
 climax of this imagery seems close to being an example of fairy-tale
 metaphorology.

The Red and Violet Flowers

Proust specifically mentions the red and violet flowers four times,
 three times in the *Redevelopment* and once in the *Redevelopment*
 in the *Redevelopment*. Each passage in which they appear represents
 Proust's imagery for knowledge and experience - a general theme which
 runs through the *Redevelopment*. Just as in a fairy tale, Marcel does

(1) We choose here to translate 'violettes' as 'violet'. 'Purple' is
 'purple' because the former adjective is more common in English. The
 word is often associated with flowers and insects. However, the
 meaning is, in French, a private symbol, that is, a symbol of
 a private life. The word is also used in the *Redevelopment* to refer to
 the 'purple' of the 'purple' of the 'purple' of the 'purple' of the
 'purple' of the 'purple' of the 'purple' of the 'purple' of the 'purple'
 with the name of the orchid, cannot see - 'the purple of the purple'
 (cf. p. 342-3).

(2) *Violettes*, Proust: *Le Redovelopment* and *Le Redovelopment*
 Proust, *Le Redovelopment* and *Le Redovelopment*
 Proust, *Le Redovelopment* and *Le Redovelopment*, p. 342.

The third image in the trilogy of flowers which re-emphasize the colour symbolism of the hawthorns is that of the red and violet flowers. As we have seen, red to Proust (and traditionally) is the colour of passion or experience and so, as this chapter and the next will show, is violet ⁽¹⁾. Proust never identifies these flowers. Yet, as Rina Viers suggests, "une "grande fleur de sang" se trouve à un point central de La Recherche. Elle passe totalement inaperçue aux yeux du botaniste mais pas à ceux de "l'herborisateur humain" qu'est Marcel Proust. Cette "grande fleur de sang", c'est la duchesse de Guermantes" ⁽²⁾. In other words, the red and violet flowers are very much part of Proust's human landscape - and, in fact, the 'blood flower' metaphor which forms the climax of this imagery comes close to being an example of fairy-tale metamorphosis.

Proust specifically mentions the red and violet flowers four times, three times in Du Côté de Chez Swann and once at the beginning of Le Côté de Guermantes. Each passage in which they appear expresses Marcel's longing for knowledge and experience - a general desire which soon focuses on Mme de Guermantes. Just as in a fairy tale, Marcel does

(1) We choose here to translate 'violet' as 'violet', rather than 'purple' because the former adjective is more specific, a bluish purple often associated with flowers and insects. Moreover, it reminds us, in Proust's private symbolism, that this flower is of a colour belonging to the visible material world; in direct contrast, "la petite phrase" from Vinteuil's sonata comes from a spiritual world which Swann the socialite, for example, though well acquainted with the mauve of the orchid, cannot see - "un monde ultra-violet" (C. S., pp. 347-8).

(2) Viers, Rina : La Signification des Fleurs dans l'Oeuvre de Marcel Proust, Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust et des Amis de Combray no. 25, 1975, p. 161.

not realize the unhappiness that his fulfilled wish may bring, an unhappiness followed, as is the fairy-tale custom, by wisdom. When he finally becomes friends with Mme de Guermantes, Marcel understands why the red and violet flowers are such good symbols for her, sometimes a victim, at other times a cruel observer. As usual with so many of Proust's flowers, the red and violet blossoms develop in profundity in the book as Marcel's understanding of them grows.

In the first passage in which they appear, the red and violet flowers are part of a countryside which Marcel discovers in a novel. As usual, Marcel wants to find their equivalent in the world of experience, and, as usual, he will eventually find a great deal more than he bargained for :

C'est ainsi que pendant deux étés, dans la chaleur du jardin de Combray, j'ai eu, à cause du livre que je lisais alors, la nostalgie d'un pays montueux et fluvial, où je verrais beaucoup de scieries et où, au fond de l'eau claire, des morceaux de bois pourrissaient sous des touffes de cresson : non loin montaient le long des murs bas des grappes de fleurs violettes et rougeâtres. Et comme le rêve d'une femme qui m'aurait aimé était toujours présent à ma pensée, ces étés-là ce rêve fut imprégné de la fraîcheur des eaux courantes; et quelle que fût la femme que j'évoquais, des grappes de fleurs violettes et rougeâtres s'élevaient aussitôt de chaque côté d'elle comme des couleurs complémentaires
(C. S., p. 86).

Proust uses the word 'nostalgia' here as elsewhere as a sign of Marcel's immaturity. Once again, Marcel's daydreams of love are associated with gardens - the garden in which he reads his book, and the garden wall supporting the flowers in the novel. The image of the walled garden

may even suggest (since Marcel finds it so sympathetic) Marcel's somewhat isolated nature. Marcel talks of finding a woman who would love him - yet he makes no mention of loving her in return. Such a relationship, of course, must resemble the one between mother and son to Marcel, for he believes that the only woman one can trust to love one totally (without one's necessarily even returning the love) is one's mother. Or, in Marcel's case, one's grandmother.

Although we cannot definitely identify the book which Marcel was reading, it bears striking resemblances to the one book which Marcel cites as the most influential in his whole childhood - François le Champi.

François le Champi has a river setting; the heroine is wife to a miller.

The main theme concerns an adopted boy's growing love for the woman he has regarded as his teacher and his mother, and whom he eventually marries. Ironically, François le Champi is the book Marcel's mother chooses to read to him on the night when he has finally managed to have her to himself, spending the night in his room rather than his father's. Marcel sees a further example of his own rivalry with his father in the legend of Geneviève de Brabant : "j'avais hâte de courir à la salle à manger ... et de tomber dans les bras de maman que les malheurs de Geneviève de Brabant me rendaient plus chère, tandis que les crimes de Golo me faisaient examiner ma propre conscience avec plus de scrupules" (C. S., p. 10). Obviously, Marcel sees himself in the role of Golo, the unscrupulous rival for the favours of Geneviève, the virtuous wife,

or, in Marcel's personal drama, his mother. (A further link between the red and violet flowers, François le Champi and the legend of Geneviève, apart from their shared theme of taboo love, is the red colour common, in some way, to all of them. This subject we will discuss later).

Now, Mme de Guermantes is old enough to be Marcel's mother. She lives in a stretch of land by the river, and, as far as Marcel knows, she is even a descendant of Geneviève de Brabant. Therefore, it is no wonder that Marcel transfers his dreams of a loving teacher and mistress to her, as the following passage illustrates :

Puis il arriva que sur le côté de Guermantes je passai (sic) parfois devant de petits enclos humides où montaient des grappes de fleurs sombres. Je m'arrêtais, croyant acquérir une notion précieuse, car il me semblait avoir sous les yeux un fragment de cette région fluviatile que je désirais tant connaître depuis que je l'avais vue décrite par un de mes écrivains préférés. Et ce fut avec elle, avec son sol imaginaire traversé de cours d'eau bouillonnants, que Guermantes, changeant d'aspect dans ma pensée, s'identifia, quand j'eus entendu le docteur Percepied nous parler des fleurs et des belles eaux vives qu'il y avait dans le parc du château. Je rêvais que Mme de Guermantes m'y faisait venir, éprise pour moi d'un soudain caprice; tout le jour elle y pêchait la truite avec moi. Et le soir, me tenant par la main, en passant devant les petits jardins de ses vassaux, elle me montrait, le long des murs bas, les fleurs qui y appuient leurs quenouilles violettes et rouges et m'apprenait leurs noms. Elle me faisait lui dire le sujet des poèmes que j'avais l'intention de composer ... tâchant de trouver un sujet où je pusse faire tenir une signification philosophique infini, mon esprit s'arrêtait de fonctionner ... je sentais que je n'avais pas de génie ... Parfois je comptais sur mon père pour arranger cela. (C. S., pp. 172-173).

There could scarcely be a more symbolic daydream of the young Marcel's wish for knowledge. The image of the garden, with its mythical

undertones, is clearer than ever. The images of the flower stems supported by the humid little enclosures have sexual overtones, continuing Marcel's association of the red and the violet flowers with love. And Marcel hopes that Mme de Guermantes will show him these gardens in the evenings. However, even more than any sexual experience she can give him, Marcel, above all a poet, seeks to know the true names and nature of things. Still, he would like to win knowledge and talent easily; at this point, as René Girard says, Marcel, on a 'search for salvation by magical means' ⁽³⁾, believes that he can succeed simply by fishing with Mme de Guermantes or by asking his seemingly all-powerful father to arrange things for him.

It is difficult to know how much Proust's knowledge of fairy tale, myth, and legend inspire him to choose fishing as a means of gaining knowledge. Both Grimm's tales and those of the Arabian Nights tell of fishermen being granted wishes by the magical beings they catch in their nets. Moreover, we have already mentioned in the Hawthorne chapter Proust's knowledge and use of the Fisher King myth. Jessie Weston, in analyzing this myth, lays particular emphasis on the tradition of the fish in folk lore as a symbol of creativity and life originating, as does all life, from water ⁽⁴⁾ (the sea, the womb, rain, semen). Proust also frequently mentions the old legend of the fairy Mélusine, protectress of the Lusignan family, whom he associates with the Guermantes. This

(3) Girard, René : Proust, Introduction, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1962, p. 3.

(4) Weston, Jessie : From Ritual to Romance, Doubleday Anchor, New York, 1957, p. 125.

fairy was half woman, half fish (or half serpent according to other versions - a dragon, in fact). Serpents and dragons are commonly held to impart knowledge, especially if the hero eats of them, as in the Grimms' fairy tale of the white snake and the epic of Sigurd and the dragon Fafnir. Even the Bible calls the serpent the subtlest of beasts, although because of its role as a tempter its knowledge is evil. Furthermore, in Celtic mythology, the hero had only to taste the flesh of the salmon of wisdom to gain all knowledge. There is some evidence that Proust knew Celtic mythology, from his reference to their belief that the souls of the dead live on in some other being, vegetable or animal (C. S., p. 44). In any case, unwittingly or not, Proust draws together all these themes and symbols in a passage at the end of Le Temps Retrouvé, describing Mme de Guermantes :

je venais de la voir, passant entre une double haie de curieux qui, sans se rendre compte des merveilleux artifices de toilette et d'esthétique qui agissaient sur eux, émus devant cette tête rousse, ce corps saumoné émergeant à peine de ses ailerons de dentelle noir, et étranglé de joyaux, le regardaient, dans la sinuosité héréditaire de ses lignes, comme ils eussent fait de quelque vieux poisson sacré, chargé de pierreries, en lequel s'incarnait le Génie protecteur de la famille de Guermantes. (T. R., p. 927).

Proust deftly makes this passage into a human landscape (of which Mme de Guermantes is the animating fairy) by the metaphor of the 'hedge' of onlookers. There are many parallels between Mme de Guermantes and her ancestress, Mélusine, from whom she has inherited her sinuous lines. She performs a similar function to Mélusine's in protecting the integrity of the Guermantes. But her power is waning, as the family is now

headed by Mme Verdurin, the new Princess of Guermantes. The duchess is a sacred fish, just as Mélusine was a fairy dragon; the duchess shares with dragons some of their reputation for wisdom, their love of jewels (an important symbol as we shall see) and their cruelty, which we shall also see later. Proust describes the duchess, as he did Gilberte, with the significant adjective 'rousse'. Marcel is one of the few people, at this point, to realize to just what an extent Oriane's supposed link to Geneviève de Brabant, Mélusine and the Lusignans, her reputation for wit, and her beauty are artifice. Like Odette, the duchess is good at creating an appearance, which concerns her a great deal, as we shall see in the incident of the red shoes.

However, at the early part of the novel when Marcel first dreams of fishing with the duchess, he truly believes in her magic. He does not realize that knowledge requires a much more strenuous type of fishing, a search for the fragments of experience buried in the subconscious, a search which demands a great deal of effort. Yet, Mme de Guermantes has a great deal to teach him - lessons that will be far more harsh than the magic he had hoped for.

If Swann is in some ways Marcel's spiritual father, then Mme de Guermantes can be seen, to some extent, as Margaret Mein suggests, as Marcel's spiritual mother ⁽⁵⁾. Her 'way' seems to complement his; her river

(5) Mein, Margaret : Le Général et le Particulier dans l'oeuvre de Marcel Proust, Bulletin des Amis de Marcel Proust et des Amis de Combray no. 20, 1970, p. 984.

landscape and, later, town garden balance Swann's Tansonville park and Odette's winter garden. All these settings become sources of knowledge to Marcel, as they were in the past to Swann and the duchess. As the duchess says, "c'est Swann qui m'a toujours beaucoup parlé de botanique. Quelquefois, quand cela nous embêtait trop d'aller à un thé ou à une matinée, nous partions pour la campagne et il me montrait des mariages extraordinaires de fleurs..." Swann's marriage being no less extraordinary than those of the flowers, but much more inconvenient, Mme de Guermantes gives up her friendship for Swann, but not before she has learned that "Il paraît que, rien que dans mon petit bout de jardin, il se passe en plein jour plus de choses inconvenantes que la nuit ... dans le Bois de Boulogne!" (C. G., pp. 516-517). Her courtyard and garden, we shall see, form the setting for two very important human landscapes - the orchid/bee encounter of Jupien and Charlus and the incident of the red shoes, in which Mme de Guermantes takes on her true role as "une grande fleur de sang".

The third time that Marcel mentions the red and violet flowers, the river landscape and the fairy Mélusine occurs at the beginning of Du Côté de Guermantes. In Combray, the duchess' beautiful estate could foster in Marcel dreams of Medieval grandeur not much paler than those originally inspired by the magic lantern story of Geneviève de Brabant :

Un donjon sans épaisseur qui n'était qu'une bande de lumière orangée et du haut duquel le seigneur et sa dame décidaient de la vie et de la mort de leurs vassaux, avait fait place - tout au bout de ce "côté de Guermantes" où, par tant de beaux après-midi, je suivais avec mes parents le cours de la Vivonne - à cette

terre torrentueuse où la duchesse m'apprenait à pêcher la truite et à connaître le nom des fleurs aux grappes violettes et rougeâtres qui décoraient les murs bas des enclos environnants; puis ç'avait été la terre héréditaire, le poétique domaine où cette race altière de Guermantes, comme une tour jaunissante et fleuronée qui traverse les âges, s'élevait déjà sur la France, alors que le ciel était encore vide là où devaient plus tard surgir Notre-Dame de Paris et Notre-Dame de Chartres.
(C. G., p. 13).

Notice that Marcel is particularly impressed in his imaginings about the Guermantes with their power of life or death over their vassals; for the first, but not the last time, this family is thus associated with the idea of the executioner. At another point, elaborating on his beliefs during his 'golden age of faith', Marcel says :

alors chaque château, chaque hôtel ou palais fameux a sa dame ou sa fée ... Parfois, cachée au fond de son nom, la fée se transforme au gré de la vie de notre imagination qui la nourrit; c'est ainsi que l'atmosphère où Mme de Guermantes existait en moi, après n'avoir été pendant des années que la reflet d'un verre de lanterne magique et d'un vitrail d'église, commençait à éteindre ses couleurs, quand des rêves tout autres l'imprégnèrent de l'écumeuse humidité des torrents.

Cependant, la fée dépérit si nous nous approchons de la personne réelle à laquelle correspond son nom, car, cette personne, le nom alors commence à la refléter et elle ne contient rien de la fée.

(C. G., p. 11).

Marcel in these passages describes three clear stages in his belief in Mme de Guermantes and his subsequent disillusionment. The first, the most naive level of Marcel's belief, is the one on which Mme de Guermantes is associated with the magic lantern and the stained glass window in the Combray church. The second is concerned with Marcel's seeking for knowledge, and it introduces the red and violet flowers. The third

occurs when Marcel begins to meet the Guermantes in real life. Saint-Loup tells him that the family château has only belonged to them since the seventeenth century, and the duchess on closer acquaintance turns out to be very human indeed. When Marcel and his family move to Paris, they become close neighbours of the Guermantes, and the magic wears off very quickly. Marcel is particularly disappointed in the Guermantes' cluttered courtyard and their tiny garden - little realizing how much he will witness there.

In fact, the passages we have quoted show how important colours are to Proust. Marcel's waning belief can be traced through the colours he associates with Mme de Guermantes. Red always predominates. At first, however, it is glorious shades of red or orange - "le nom amarante" (C. G., p. 14), the final syllable suggesting the colour; "la teinte orangée d'une syllabe" (C. S., p. 175). Even the duchess' name, Oriane, suggests a golden age, though it may rather be a golden age of Marcel's belief than a golden age of chivalry.

The magic lantern and the cover of François le Champi, whose theme and setting suit Marcel's dreams of Mme de Guermantes, add another level of meaning to the colour red. As we have seen, Marcel identifies himself with Golo, the villainous rival for Geneviève, at this point associated with Marcel's mother, but soon to be associated with the duchess. Golo wears a red tunic in Marcel's version of the legend. As for François

le Champi, which describes a similar (to Marcel) mother/father/son triangle, and which symbolizes Marcel's stolen night with his mother, "sa couverture rougeâtre et son titre incompréhensible donnait pour moi une personnalité distincte et un attrait mystérieux à (ce livre)" (C. S., p. 41). From the puzzling title, for Marcel's mother refused to explain that 'le champi' means foundling or bastard, and from her habit of skipping the love scenes and thus rendering the story line incomprehensible, arises, as Marcel terms it "une émanation troublante" which he forever associates with the colour of the book's cover :

Aussi tous les changements bizarres qui se produisaient dans l'attitude respective de la meunière et de l'enfant et qui ne trouvent leur explication que dans les progrès d'un amour naissant me paraissaient empreints d'un profond mystère dont je me figurais volontiers que la source devait être dans ce nom inconnu et si doux de "Champi" qui mettait sur l'enfant qui le portait sans que je susse pourquoi, sa couleur vive, empourprée et charmante. (C. S., p. 42).

The first time Marcel meets Mme de Guermantes in the flesh, she invokes some of the most important colours in the magic lantern version of Geneviève de Brabant's story. She has piercing blue eyes, a reddish complexion, and a mauve scarf. Marcel is disappointed with the latter two details, deciding that they tend to make Mme de Guermantes common, but he is tremendously pleased with her blue eyes. Blue is the colour the young Marcel most wishes to associate with the duchess. It is the colour reflected by the stained glass windows which portray the duchess' noble (and saintly) ancestors. It is also the colour of the girdle which Geneviève, the pure and chaste, wears in the magic lantern drama. Marcel's mother also wears blue, and, since the duchess is at first

something of a mother substitute, Marcel probably wishes her to share his mother's chasteness. The red of Mme de Guermantes' complexion and the mauve of her scarf clash with Marcel's preconceptions, however. Little does he realize that these are the duchess' favourite colours, ones which, moreover, suit her better than the chaste blue. Like the blemish on the duchess' face, they serve to betray "la présence matérielle d'une actrice vivante" (C. S., p. 175) underneath the costume of the fairy.

When Marcel's parents move next door to the Guermantes in Paris, Marcel becomes infatuated with the duchess. As though to mark the third stage of Marcel's belief in, and understanding of the duchess, Proust describes Oriane as wearing mainly red and purple clothes, her true colours, which suggest some of the darker side of her life. At one point, noticing her red complexion and beaky nose, the narrator likens Mme de Guermantes to a vulture (C. G., p. 62). As Fowlie points out, this description marks a changing point in Marcel's attitude to Oriane, and foreshadows her lack of sympathy for the dying Swann ⁽⁶⁾. Marcel begins to associate Oriane with flower imagery as well, so that we can see the image of the blood flower being prepared. "Au milieu de ce plumage naturel, la petite tête recourbait son bec d'oiseau et les yeux à fleur de tête étaient perçants et bleus" (C. G., p. 62). Marcel watches the duchess buy some violets. These flowers have unhappy connotations in Proust's

(6) Fowlie, Wallace : A Reading of Proust, Dennis Dobson, London, 1963, p. 278.

work. The Odette that Swann never quite knew would wear a corsage of violets (C. S., p. 240). They are also the flowers through which Proust intimates Odette's loose morals (C. S., p. 594). However, the violets and the colour violet (or mauve) will receive much more of our attention in the lilac chapter, where they both represent sensuality.

The import of Mme de Guermantes' colours becomes obvious in a description of her by Marcel :

Un de ces matins de carême où elle allait déjeuner en ville, je la rencontrai dans une robe d'un velours rouge clair, laquelle était légèrement échancrée au cou. Le visage de Mme de Guermantes paraissait rêveur sous ses cheveux blonds. J'étais moins triste que d'habitude parce que la mélancolie de son expression, l'espèce de claustration que la violence de la couleur mettait entre elle et le reste du monde, lui donnait quelque chose de malheureux et de solitaire qui me rassurait. Cette robe me semblait la matérialisation autour d'elle des rayons écarlates d'un coeur que je ne lui connaissais pas et que j'aurais peut-être pu consoler; réfugiée dans la lumière mystique de l'étoffe aux flots adoucis elle me faisait penser à quelque sainte des premiers âges chrétiens. Alors j'avais honte d'affliger par ma vue cette martyre. "Mais après tout, la rue est à tout le monde" (C. G., pp. 144-5).

To Monnin-Hornung, this scene appears quite sadistic; it reminds her of various paintings of bloody martyrdoms. "La robe "légèrement échancrée au cou" a quelque chose de sinistre, d'annonceur d'un sacrifice, évoquant celles que portent les saints qu'un bourreau va décapiter sur les fresques de Fra Angelico, et celles que Proust admirait passionnément de Mantegna" (7). The heart pierced with bloody rays must surely remind us of popular religious pictures of the transfixed and bleeding heart

(7) Monnin-Hornung, Juliette : Proust et la Peinture, Genève, 1951, p. 140.

of Mary as Mater Dolorosa, an idea which must be familiar to Marcel, always thinking of the grief he causes his mother and grandmother. If the duchess is martyred, by the way, it is probably by her husband, who contradicts her in public and who is flagrantly unfaithful. But the most important point about Mme de Guermantes' suffering is the happiness Marcel gains from it. On a humorous level, he passes a great deal of his time rescuing Mme de Guermantes from ludicrously dangerous and unhappy situations in his imagination. But on a more serious level, he shows a certain sadism which may be one of the reasons why M. de Charlus is attracted to him. Another rather strange member of the Guermantes' family, M. de Charlus is looking for a kindly 'executioner', and Marcel, here, gains a degree of pleasure from Mme de Guermantes' 'martyrdom'. As for the duchess, either she or Marcel is dramatizing her melancholy; like Marcel and his Aunt Léonie with their 'martyrdoms', she seems consciously or unconsciously to have chosen a suitable religious background - Lent - against which to parade her mortification. However, as the following discussion will show, the duchess can be persecutor as well as victim.

The most important scene in which the duchess appears in red, the incident of the red slippers, emphasizes even more the cruelty evoked by this colour. The setting for this scene is something of a fairy tale one, which is very apt, as we shall see, for it paves the way for Mme de Guermantes' 'metamorphosis' into "une espèce de grande fleur de sang,

d'un rubis en flammes" (P., p. 37). Marcel is already prepared to witness something extraordinary, for, before the duke and duchess appear, he has watched the orchid/bee encounter between Charlus and Jupien (see the orchid chapter). Proust builds up the atmosphere before the entrance of the duke and duchess with various supernatural overtones :

C'est à ses quartiers pauvres (ceux de Venise) que font penser certains quartiers pauvres de Paris, le matin, avec leurs hautes cheminées évasées, auxquelles le soleil donne les roses les plus vifs, les rouges les plus clairs; c'est tout un jardin qui fleurit ... au-dessous des maisons ... plus loin une jeune fille se laisse peigner les cheveux par une vieille à figure, à peine distincte dans l'ombre, de sorcière
(C. G., p. 572).

Marcel goes on to say that, in actual fact of realistic detail "Certes, de l'hôtel de Guermantes on n'avait pas le même genre de vues, mais de curieuses aussi ...". Metaphorically speaking, the Guermantes' courtyard does have a view of strange gardens and sorceresses. "Or cette attente sur l'escalier devait ... me découvrir un paysage ... moral" (C. G., p. 573). This 'paysage' is peopled (literally) with orchids, bees, and, of course, a great red flower.

Marcel rushes out to meet the Guermantes when he sees them in the courtyard. The duke and duchess are going to a costume party and will let nothing stand in their way. Thus, they are most unsympathetic when two rather strange sisters, relatives of theirs, come to inform them of the imminent death of a cousin. One of the sisters, Walpurgis, has a witch's name, or, at least, reminds us of the witches' climb up the mountain in Goethe's Walpurgis night scene in Faust. The two sisters use their canes as alpenstocks (C. G., p. 575) as they climb up the stairs

to the Guermantes. The duchess, whose costume lends her rather a weird aspect, acts like a wayward Fate or Norn (Proust often mentions these mythological figures) who refuses to acknowledge death, despite the warning of the other two. Yet a greater shock is to come. Swann himself is under the 'spell' of mortality. "La maladie de Swann était celle qui avait emporté sa mère et dont elle avait été atteinte précisément à l'âge qu'il avait. Nos existences sont en réalité, par l'hérédité, aussi pleines de chiffres cabalistiques, de sorts jetés, que s'il y avait vraiment des sorcières" (C. G., p. 578). The fact that Swann's fate comes from his mother and that Proust mentions sorceresses rather than sorcerers fits in with the whole mood of the piece. Mme de Guermantes, hurrying off to her party cannot spare time for Swann, one of her oldest friends, despite the fact that he is dying. Ironically, Swann has just finished tracing the Guermantes back to the noble Lusignans. Yet, at this point, Mme de Guermantes is scarcely playing her role as the good fairy. In her costume of violent colours, the duchess resembles rather a femme fatale or a sorceress. For, she is dressed in brilliant shades of red - a carefully contrived costume almost spoiled by her black shoes. This colour clash causes the duke more concern than the news of Swann's imminent death.

"M. de Guermantes rentra, et bientôt sa femme, toute prête, haute et superbe dans une robe de satin rouge dont la jupe était bordée de paillettes. Elle avait dans les cheveux une grande plume d'autruche teinte de pourpre et sur les épaules une écharpe du tulle du même rouge" (C. G., p. 583). We wonder if Proust knew the fable of the ostrich who

sticks its head in the sand to avoid disaster, a cowardice which is, here, behind Mme de Guermantes' lack of sympathy for Swann. Certainly, Proust's bird imagery in the past concerning the duchess has been most appropriate. Her appearance as a 'martyr' dressed in red has followed a description of a pigeon giving of its life blood (we shall discuss this symbol more closely in the next chapter). She has also, as we have seen, been likened to a vulture (C. G., p. 62), a suitable bird to hear tidings of death.

Swann is particularly dazzled by the duchess' rubies. "Quels magnifiques rubis!" he remarks (C. G., p. 583). The colour red as well as the colour crimson and the symbol of the rubies (ruby being a shade of red) are all associated with images of blood and suffering in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. The red we have already seen tingeing the hawthorns has symbolic connotations of the communion chalice - "comme au fond d'une coupe de marbre rose, de rouges sanguines" (C. S., p. 140). The scarlet reminds us of the sunset over the Calvary at Combray - "un bandeau de pourpre au fond des bois du Calvaire" (C. S., p. 133). And, at one point, when he is feeling very sorry for himself over the suffering that Albertine is causing him, Marcel talks of "la pourpre mystérieuse et figée" of the rising sun "qui me parut symboliser le sanglant sacrifice que j'allais avoir à faire de toute joie" (S. G., p. 1128).

But Mme de Guermantes' role, as we have seen, has moved from martyr to, if not persecutor, at least cruel bystander. And to this latter role, Proust dedicates the motif of the rubies - closely associated with venomous flowers and flames. All the predatory females in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu at one point or another express cruelty or greed in a lust for rubies. In the original metaphor of dangerous women surrounded by venomous flowers and burning jewels, Proust was inspired by the paintings of Gustave Moreau, about whom we will hear much more in the lilac chapter. "la femme entretenue - chatoyant amalgame d'éléments inconnus et diaboliques, serti, comme une apparition de Gustave Moreau, de fleurs vénéneuses entrelacées à des bijoux précieux" (C. S., p. 267-8). Now, this particular quotation refers to Odette, who lives in a hothouse environment of orchids, violets, roses in a salon with "un feu incandescent de charbon, précieusement posé derrière une vitrine de cristal, dans une cuve de marbre blanc où il faisait écrouler de temps à autre ses dangereux rubis" (J. F., p. 527). Even when Odette has outlived her beauty, she still manages to exact a tribute from men, for she blackmails Robert into giving her rubies in exchange for persuading Gilberte, her daughter and his wife, to give him the freedom he needs for his homosexual affairs (F., p. 684). Albertine is even more strongly associated with the theme of the predatory woman through the symbol of the ruby. She has two ruby rings which bear the insignia of the eagle on them; Albertine swears her aunt gave her one and she bought herself the other. However, Françoise's suspicions awaken Marcel's own and he

notices the perfect similarity of the two rings. On this slim evidence, he decides that the rings were gifts from a rich patron :

Atterré, les deux bagues à la main, je regardais cet aigle impitoyable dont le bec me tenaillait le coeur, dont les ailes aux plumes en relief avaient emporté la confiance que je gardais dans mon amie, et sous les serres duquel mon esprit meurtri ne pouvait pas échapper un instant aux questions posées sans cesse relativement à cet inconnu dont l'aigle symbolisait sans doute le nom sans pourtant me le laisser lire, qu'elle avait aimé sans doute autrefois, et qu'elle avait revu sans doute il n'y avait pas longtemps, puisque c'est le jour si doux, si familial, de la promenade ensemble au Bois, que j'avais vu pour la première fois la seconde bague, celle où l'aigle avait l'air de tremper son bec dans la nappe de sang clair du rubis
(F., pp. 464-465).

Here, again, ruby and bird and blood imagery mark out the cruel role of women; however, the alacrity with which Marcel concocts a jealous tale out of circumstantial evidence shows that he plays a major part in his own torture. In the case of Mme de Guermantes, whose rubies started this discussion, the duchess is shown to be unfaithful in friendship (though not in love) to Swann. She gives him up after his unfortunate marriage and, of course, she will not acknowledge his coming death.

Marcel's most effective metaphor for Mme de Guermantes, one which she takes as a compliment ⁽⁸⁾, is one that he coins some years later, when he thinks of Mme de Guermantes' unfeelingness on the night of the incident of the red shoes. He describes her as "une espèce de grande fleur de sang, d'un rubis en flammes" (P., p. 37). With our knowledge of the associations of these images, we can judge how much of a compliment

(8) Viers, Rina : La Signification des Fleurs dans l'Oeuvre de Marcel Proust, p. 162.

this comment is. Still, at this point, Marcel is still following his prototype, Swann, down a road leading (it seems) away from art and towards love. He asks Mme de Guermantes if such a dress as her red one would be suitable for Albertine. We, of course, seeing the similarity of role Proust ascribes to the two women can answer a - metaphorical - yes.

Thus, the red and the violet flowers are associated first with knowledge - sexual experience, learning the names of flowers and awakening of an artistic vocation. Marcel never does discover the botanical names for these flowers, but, as he himself dreamed, he meets these flowers in real life (metamorphosed we might say) through Mme de Guermantes. They and their associated images symbolize suffering, cruelty and greed, but they can be very beautiful. Marcel's fairy tale wish come true is as uncomfortable as many of those in traditional tales.